



University of Connecticut
OpenCommons@UConn

Honors Scholar Theses

Honors Scholar Program

Spring 5-1-2020

Teaching Practices, Institutional Cultures, and Access to Music Learning

Jonah Garcia
jonah.garcia@uconn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://opencommons.uconn.edu/srhonors_theses



Part of the [Art Education Commons](#), [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), and the [Secondary Education and Teaching Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Garcia, Jonah, "Teaching Practices, Institutional Cultures, and Access to Music Learning" (2020). *Honors Scholar Theses*. 710.

https://opencommons.uconn.edu/srhonors_theses/710

Teaching Practices, Institutional Cultures, and Access to Music Learning

Jonah Garcia

Honors Thesis

Dr. Cara Bernard, Thesis Supervisor

Dr. Catherine Little and Dr. Eric Rice, Honors Advisors

University of Connecticut

May 15, 2020

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	4
Acknowledgements.....	5
Chapter 1: Introduction	6
Research Questions	8
Purpose of the Study	9
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature	10
Financial Barriers	10
Funding for Music Programs	11
Cultural and Content Barriers	13
Effects of Policy on Music Representation and Participation	15
Achievement Advocacy	16
Conclusion	17
Chapter 3: Method	18
Process.....	18
Data Collection and Analysis.....	19
Setting and Participants	20
District Reference Groups (DRGs)	20
Southview High School	22
Southview Participants	22
Lakeside High School	23
Lakeside Participants	23
Chapter 4: Findings.....	25
Community Support and Advocacy	25
School Culture	28
Relationships and Belonging	29
Mechanisms of Support	31
Program Culture and Strategies	34
Summary.....	42
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	43
Connections to Literature.....	43
National Policy	43
Financial Barriers	44
Program Offerings and Lived Experiences	45
New offerings	45
Ensemble courses	47
Site comparison	49
Application to Practice	49
Recommendations for Future Research.....	51

References.....	53
Appendices.....	59
Appendix A: Recruitment Email	59
Appendix B: Consent Form	60
Appendix C: Interview Protocol	64
Appendix D: Interview Transcriptions	65
Alice Morrison, Principal, Lakeside High School	65
Will Jones, Choir Teacher, Lakeside High School	72
Beth Pawlak, Orchestra Teacher, Lakeside High School	78
John Rossi, Guitar/Songwriting Teacher, Lakeside High School	84
George Davis, Principal, Southview High School	90
Ron Miller, Choir Teacher, Southview High School	95

Abstract

The mission of the National Association for Music Education is “to advance music education by promoting the understanding and making of music by all” (NAfME, n.d.-b). Despite these aspirations of equality, research suggests that both demographics and geography have a role in determining who is able to participate and who will choose to participate in school music (Elpus & Abril, 2019; Salvador and Allegood, 2014). This study examined the factors that influence school music participation and the representation of student populations in the music programs of two Connecticut secondary schools. Names of schools and participants have been changed to preserve anonymity. This study utilized a collective case study approach, and participants included four music educators and the principals of the two schools. Data were collected through a document review and semi-structured interviews with each participant. Using a cross-case analysis, data showed that factors at the community, school, and program levels affected access to music classes and student interest in music learning opportunities. The findings suggest that certain teacher and administrator philosophies, policies, and practices are particularly effective in preserving and expanding music programs that serve socioeconomically diverse populations.

Acknowledgements

Over the course of this study and my time at the University of Connecticut, I have been fortunate to have the guidance, support, and encouragement of wonderful educators. First and foremost I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Cara Bernard, who has been incredibly helpful in giving her time and insight to this project from its inception to the final editing process. I am also grateful to Dr. Catherine Little for her encouraging advice throughout the past two years and to Dr. Eric Loken for introducing me to the fundamentals of education research. I would also like to thank my mentors in the music department, Dr. Eric Rice and Dr. Jamie Spillane, for guiding me throughout my college years. Finally, I am endlessly grateful to my parents, to my fellow music education students, and to Anna Baker for giving me all the support I could have asked for.

Chapter 1

Introduction

One can tell a lot about a school by looking at the demographics. However, as a group, secondary level music students tend to look demographically different from the general population of secondary students. In national profiles of high school students, Elpus and Abril (2011, 2019) examined music classes and found that students who participated in school music were more likely to be female, affluent, white, English speaking, and high achieving compared to their peers who were not ensemble participants. Salvador and Allegood (2014) compared schools with high populations of nonwhite students to schools with low populations of nonwhite students across two cities and found that schools with more nonwhite students were significantly less likely to offer music programs. They also found a significant difference in quality of and access to music programs between the two cities regardless of the racial/ethnic composition of the student population.

These stark differences of student participation and quality occur despite music educators calling for the inclusion of all participants. For example, the mission of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) is “to advance music education by promoting the understanding and making of music by all” (NAfME, n.d.-b). Despite these aspirations of equality, it appears that both demographics and geography have a role in determining who is able to participate and who will choose to participate in music. These inequalities are troubling if we are to believe the claim frequently offered by music education advocates that participation in school music confers benefits beyond the music classroom. The “Music Education and Academic Achievement” section of the website of the National Association for Music Education leads off with a claim

that “on the 2012 SAT, students who participated in music scored an average of 31 points above average in reading, 23 points above average in math, and 31 points above average in writing” (NAfME, n.d.-c). Elpus (2007) explains that this “‘music-makes-you-smarter’ research” has been a go-to advocacy tactic for music education and has been frequently employed by national music education groups (p. 14).

Some researchers, however, have raised troubling questions about these advocacy tactics, and whether or not many of these relations of musical participation to academic achievement have properly controlled for all of the demographic differences between music students and non-music students (Elpus, 2007; Elpus & Abril, 2011). Elpus (2013) later returned to the issue of demographic covariates in research on music and achievement. He examined large, nationally representative data sets from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 and determined that, while music students did score higher on the SAT, these effects diminished to nonsignificance once controls for demographics, IEP status, differences between schools, and prior academic achievement were introduced (Elpus, 2013). This finding indicates that understanding the demographics of our music programs is essential for unbiased research on music education, as well as for informed and honest advocacy efforts. Additionally, this finding is also essential for understanding inequalities in music access and participation and determining why and where music education falls short of its egalitarian goals.

Authors in music education have explored a wide range of barriers and inequalities to student participation and representation in school music, ranging from financial obligations to cultural disconnects and larger policy forces (Albertson, 2015; Bernard & Abramo, 2020; Elpus, 2011; Elpus, 2013). Some students have little or no access to music education in school, and

many choose not to engage in music programs that are offered. If music educators believe that all students should take part in music education, then we must understand who currently participates as well as the factors that block or dissuade other students from participating. However, the policies, attitudes, and strategies in individual schools may serve as barriers or entry points to participation, and more research is needed to determine the nature of these factors and to understand how they apply to different populations of students.

I am a music education student in my senior year of undergraduate study at the University of Connecticut, and will be pursuing my Master's degree in music education beginning in Fall 2020. My current focus is secondary-level choral music, and I have developed an interest in research related to educational equity during my undergraduate coursework. I was placed for both clinical observation and student teaching at the two participant sites for this study, which gave me additional insight on both music programs and the communities they serve. Despite limited funding and relatively low socioeconomic status in comparison to other schools I had observed, these programs seemed to thrive. Both programs travelled extensively, managing massive financial undertakings from tours to Canada to performances at Carnegie Hall. I wondered, what systems, structures, and policies supported these kinds of activities? Were these—what I call institutional cultures—purposeful, and homegrown? How did teachers approach their work, and what drew students to participate?

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. What, if any, program offerings and institutional cultures do schools with racially and/or economically diverse populations implement for maximum music learning?

2. What are the pedagogies and practices that music teachers implement to provide and enforce these offerings and policies, and make them accessible?
3. How do institutional culture, program offerings, and school policies drive access to and participation in music programs?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influence school music participation and the representation of student populations in the music programs of two Connecticut secondary schools. Names of schools and participants have been changed to preserve anonymity.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Prior to data collection, I conducted a literature review on topics surrounding barriers to access and points of entry for secondary level music study. The first section describes financial barriers. The second section discusses issues of culture and the content taught in music courses. Finally, the third section examines national policy forces and advocacy efforts surrounding music education.

Financial Barriers

Bates (2012) suggested that financial barriers can make participation in music difficult for some students. The financial barriers of music participation can be substantial, with students often required to pay instrument rental fees and to purchase essential equipment like reeds, rosin, and specialized attire out of pocket. The costs of participating in special musical programs like trips and festivals are often high as well. These costs, while they may be easily affordable for affluent families, can serve as a barrier for some students from the beginning of potential school music study. In a national survey of secondary school principals conducted by Abril and Gault (2008), many principals indicated that the socioeconomic status of the school population limited the success of music programs; one principal directly wrote that “many students do not participate in band because their families cannot afford it” (p. 76).

As students move toward the secondary level, supplementary instruction through private lessons becomes a common practice and contributes to differences in educational opportunity between students with access to lessons and those without access. This disparity helps to drive Bates’s (2012) assertion that, in many cases, “The markers for success in music education—

participation in select ensembles, first-chair placements, leading roles, high scores at festival—will be reserved for middle-class and affluent students” (p. 34). Bates (2017) later examined the groups invited to perform at a state-level music education conference in the Western U.S. and determined that free and reduced lunch rates in those schools ranged from 10 to 25 percent below the state average. These typically highly valued musical experiences act as reinforcers of musical self-concept, which in turn positively influences music participation rates for those who are able to participate (Demorest, Kelley, & Pfordresher, 2017). This indicates that traditional ideas of what it means to be successful in music may contribute to the substantial demographic disparities identified by Elpus and Abril (2019).

Funding for Music Programs

Funding for music programs can help ameliorate the financial barriers discussed above and is critical when considering the common lack of music programming in schools (Salvador and Allegood, 2014). Funding music programs in public schools, however, is often a complex and difficult operation. Elpus (2007) described that “The unfortunate and grim reality is that music education needs advocacy because in many locations, the public policymakers with the most direct influence over the educational system see little or no value in music as a core subject” (p. 14). Miksza (2013) furthered the necessity of advocating for “resources such as funding, enhanced staffing (in terms of numbers or specialization/credentials), and instructional time with children, because without such resources, comprehensive arts instruction is not likely to occur” (p. 25).

Key factors for attaining stable funding uncovered by case study researchers in districts that fund music include community advocacy (Hedgecoth & Major, 2018), program quality, and

the use of the music program as a marketing tool for the district (Major, 2013). Schools and districts vary widely in their ability to fund music education, however, with schools in urban areas tending to report less adequate funding and staff for the arts (Miksza, 2013). The frequent lack of adequate resources for public school music is well recognized in the general media. Recent articles such as “In New York High Schools, the Sound of Music is Muted” in the *New York Times* describe schools with extremely limited or nonexistent music programs due to insufficient levels of funding and staff (Bloch, 2018). In Philadelphia, one Pulitzer-winning composer wrote a symphony for 400 broken instruments that were in storage because the Philadelphia School District could not afford to repair them (Barone, 2017). The lack of resources, staff, and equipment in many schools reduces the quality of music education programs and can place additional financial barriers around music participation for students. Some students, like the subjects in Slater et al.’s literacy study (2014) and those attending many of the schools in Salvador and Allegood’s (2014) study, have no access to music education through school and are limited to extracurricular programs for music participation.

Music programs must frequently rely on sources of funding other than the district budget, including ticket sales, course fees, and fundraising. In Fermanich’s (2011) analysis of a large school district, general funding was used almost entirely for staff while instructional materials, transportation, and other expenditures relied mostly on these secondary funding sources that are drawn at least partially from students and their families.

Guides on how to maintain a successful music program despite limited resources are common (e.g. “Doing a Lot with a Little: Navigating a limited budget at a small school,” Edgar & McGuire, 2018) and often necessary for teachers in underfunded or understaffed programs.

Edgar and McGuire's (2018) suggestions range from seeking free resources online to soliciting donations from local businesses and writing grants. Rajan (2016) delved more deeply into the grant writing process in her guide on funding music, breaking down the potentially daunting process into manageable steps and encouraging teachers to emphasize interdisciplinary collaboration when seeking grant funding. The variety of these resources available to music teachers illustrates the prevalence of underresourced and underfunded music programs in schools.

Cultural and Content Barriers

The types of courses being offered in schools can also be a significant driver of participation and representation. Several authors have called for a paradigm shift in music education, arguing that school music programs must adapt in course offerings and content to survive. Kratus (2007) argued that "music education has become disconnected from the prevailing culture" (p. 44), leading to declining enrollment in music courses. Williams (2011) also expressed a growing disconnect between the way music is experienced in and out of schools. He characterized the dominant large ensembles of American music education as out of touch with today's students and lacking in opportunities for students to make choices and exercise creativity. Williams (2007) also previously argued that, in many schools, these ensembles do not actively teach skills that are usable beyond graduation unless students are going on to become career musicians. This problem is exacerbated by the nature of college-level music teacher preparation programs, which act as the primary gatekeepers of the music-teaching profession and which typically emphasize Western classical models of musical performance in

both the standards for admission and the content that students are taught (Bernard & Abramo, 2020).

These and other authors have advocated for course offerings that are more accessible, more focused on student interests, and more conducive to student decision-making and creativity (Crooke & McFerran, 2014; McFerran & Crooke, 2017; Tobias, 2015). There are obstacles to integrating nontraditional offerings into music programs, however, including the widespread focus on traditional class models and musical styles in music teacher education programs (Herbert, 2011). In one case study, students in a music teacher education program spent over 99% of music course time on Western music traditions (Wang & Humphreys, 2009). Abril and Gault (2008), in their national survey of secondary principals, also found a widespread lack of knowledge about courses like music tech, composition, and mariachi that are not traditional parts of secondary music programs but that may help increase participation and engagement for many students. It is important to note that an additive approach, where new offerings exist alongside rather than instead of traditional programming, may be effective in increasing participation rates as it was in Hedgecoth and Major's 2018 case study of 3 districts with recently revised music programs.

Thibeault (2015) described the contrast between performative and participatory music education as a framework for categorizing musical offerings in schools. Performative music education, which encompasses most traditional ensembles, divides between observers/audience and specialized musicians and makes the presentation of music in concerts the main goal. In a participatory music education, however, everyone present can take part in musical creation. Participatory music might utilize instruments that require less specialized knowledge and that

students are more likely to continue playing after they leave school, like guitars and ukuleles (Bernard & Cayari, 2020; Thibeault & Evoy, 2011). This more accessible approach to music has been applied to course offerings with great effects on student participation, especially when courses focus on musical styles like pop, folk, and samba that match the day-to-day experience of students better than traditional classical-style repertoire of performative ensembles (Thibeault, 2015).

Effects of Policy on Music Participation and Representation

The effect of national policy on music education is a frequent subject for authors in the field, who have generally found that focusing on testing and accountability has had a negative effect on music programs (Abril & Gault, 2008; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012). Case studies by Spohn (2008) and West (2012) have suggested that, in particular, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) negatively affected instructional time for the arts. Abril and Gault (2008) found that while a narrow majority of high school principals claimed that NCLB had no effect on their music programs, many did claim negative effects.

Despite most music teachers reporting that the NCLB had a “deleterious impact for music education” (p. 216), Elpus (2014) found that the proportion of students participating in music education remained relatively stable in the decades before and after the policy took effect. The overall stability of music participation despite the broad changes to education under NCLB may contribute to Abril and Bannerman’s (2015) finding that music teachers perceived national factors as having less of an effect on their programs than school- and district- level factors. However, Elpus (2014) found a significant decrease in representation rates of Hispanic students after the passage of NCLB, and participation rates for ELL students and students with IEPs

declined steadily between 1982 and 2009. This trend towards more severe underrepresentation of Hispanic students, ELL students, and students with IEPs indicates that national policy can introduce barriers to participation for some students and reduce representation of diverse populations in music programs.

National policy, however, has had positive effects on music programs as well. While the enumeration of the arts as a core subject and the introduction of standards under the Goals 2000 act of 1994 did not increase the number of unique music courses in schools, it does appear to have contributed to a large increase in states that require arts coursework for high school graduation (Elpus, 2013). ESSA (2015) specified music independently of the other arts as a part of a well-rounded education, which was viewed by many music education advocates as a positive step for the legitimacy of music in schools (Kos Jr., 2018). NAFME even called the passage of ESSA “an historic victory for music education advocates” (NAfME, n.d.-a). Once ESSA has been policy for a longer period of time, researchers are expected to empirically investigate the effects of this change in designation for music. (Kos Jr., 2018).

Achievement Advocacy. As described in the introduction, there has recently been a tempering of advocacy efforts that rely on associations between music participation and academic achievement. However, academic arguments for policies that support music education remain. Some researchers, like Miksza (2010), have still found positive associations between music and test scores while controlling for socioeconomic and minority status. Miksza (2010) also found positive effects of music on measures of community ethic and school engagement under these controls, with students in ensembles reporting significantly less instances of absence and tardiness. Slater et al. (2014) used a rigorous experimental approach with 42 bilingual

students from low-income schools sorted into matching-adjusted groups, and found that students who participated in extracurricular music classes maintained their age-normed scores on some reading metrics significantly better than students who did not participate. Harris (2019), in a broad review of literature on the potential benefits of music, suggested that evidence “indicates that music can enhance certain cognitive and linguistic abilities” (p. 126). These findings, along with the enumeration of music as part of a well-rounded education under the The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), indicate that music educators need to examine and understand the structural factors that lead to inequality of access to and participation in school music.

Conclusion

The music education literature has described many of the barriers that dissuade or prevent students from participating in school music. Scholars have also examined potential ways to allow and encourage more students to participate. To better understand inequities, barriers, and entry points within school music study and how they operate in context, it is important to investigate these effects within individual music programs—particularly those which serve populations with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Chapter 3

Method

This study examined the factors that influence school music participation and the representation of student populations in the music programs of two Connecticut secondary schools. The following questions guided this study:

1. What, if any, program offerings and institutional cultures do schools with racially and/or economically diverse populations implement for maximum music learning?
2. What are the pedagogies and practices that music teachers implement to provide and enforce these offerings and policies, and make them accessible?
3. How do institutional culture, program offerings, and school policies drive access to and participation in music programs?

Process

To examine these questions, I employed a multiple case study design. Creswell (1998) described a case study as “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). Yin (2009) indicated that case studies may be particularly useful to answer questions such as “how,” “why,” or “to what extent,” making the format appropriate for this study. The case study format gives the researcher boundaries as to the locations, participants, and other criteria to allow for the examination of a specific issue or system. In a collective case study design, multiple cases are chosen that fit within the bounded system under investigation. For this study, the cases chosen were two music programs that were in school districts in CT district reference group (DRG) G towns, two lower socioeconomic status, more diverse locations.

Data Collection and Analysis

Marshall and Rossman (1995) outline four main types of data collections for case study, which include participation, observation, in-depth interviewing, and review of documents. Data collection for this study occurred in Spring 2020 and consisted of one-on-one interviews and document review. Document review included the programs of study for each school—or, case; reports from the Connecticut State Department of Education; statements from each school’s website and the two music departments; and a report on educational equity commissioned by one of the schools. Documents, coupled with speaking with participants allowed a wide range of responses that would prove useful in the data analysis phase as “...the interview produces situated understandings grounded in specific interactional episodes” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 643).

After selecting the two participant sites through purposeful sampling, I emailed each school’s music teachers and principal notifying them that they had been selected to participate in the study and requesting an interview. I decided to focus on teachers and principals rather than students in order to see the inner workings of these music programs. I was primarily interested in the visions and policies of educators and how they worked to implement these visions and policies within their schools. I planned to visit both sites and conduct interviews in person, but this was prevented by school closures due to COVID-19. Once it became clear that school would not resume normally before the end of the semester, I rescheduled and moved interviews to an online format. In order to accommodate the participants’ schedules amidst the quarantine which occurred throughout the state, I spoke with each participant via Zoom for about thirty minutes using a semi-structured interview protocol with a few open-ended questions and the opportunity for follow-up questions. I hoped that this interview structure would elicit a wide range of

responses and encourage educators to talk openly about their views. I audio recorded and transcribed each interview for analysis. The email invitation, letter of consent, interview questions, and interview transcriptions can be found in Appendices A, B, C, and D, respectively. In order to protect the participants' privacy, the identities of the participants have remained private and their names have been replaced with pseudonyms. Records and research materials for this study have also remained secured and no information with defining characteristics has been released. The data was approved by the Institutional Review Board at University of Connecticut.

Data analysis occurred simultaneously to collection (Merriam, 1988). Once each interview was conducted, I analyzed the transcripts for common themes. I looked for similarities and differences between the two schools, as well as between the teachers and the administrators (Glesne, 2015). I also conducted a review of relevant documents from each school in order to confirm course offerings and to assess school and program cultures from additional sources. Based on the research questions, I connected my findings to the literature and summarized the applications to practice.

Setting and Participants

District Reference Groups (DRGs). The state of Connecticut places each of its school districts into one of nine District Reference Groups (DRGs) labeled A (highest SES) through I (lowest SES). The DRG system, which takes into account seven key variables including income, education, and home language, aims to group together “districts that have public school students with similar socioeconomic status (SES) and need” (Prowda, 2006, p. 1). Both schools in this study come from DRG G, which is made up of 17 rural towns, suburbs, and smaller cities from across Connecticut. While much of the reviewed literature focuses on schools in larger cities and areas of generally higher need, rural, and suburban programs like those found in DRG G serve

racially and/or economically diverse populations and are of interest to researchers as well. It is important to note that the DRGs were last updated in 2006, but are still the latest available classifications from the Connecticut State Department of Education.

While the DRG system attempts to group students of similar need, schools within the same DRG can serve substantially different populations. Analysis of available data from the state DOE reveals several differences between the populations of the two studied schools. These two schools are quite similar, however, in their scores on the CT Next Generation Accountability measure of arts access—they score within two points of each other on the 50-point scale based on the proportion of students who participate in the arts. While this is a very broad operational definition of arts access, it is worth noting as it is the only measure related to the arts in Connecticut’s school accountability system. Other available data on course enrollments indicate that one participant school, Lakeside, has the largest number of enrollments in music courses in the DRG, while the other, Southview, has a particularly high proportion of music course enrollments relative to all course enrollments. These schools are described in further detail below.

No one measure can indicate the presence of a strong music program in a school; but the schools’ participation in hosting student teachers and graduate interns from the University of Connecticut indicates that the teachers and administrators at these two schools may have helpful insights on the practices and attitudes that go into maintaining a successful and inclusive secondary school music program. So, this indicator and the school districts’ DRG G classification allowed for purposeful sampling to occur for these two cases. Following is a brief review of the demographics of each school population and the course offerings currently available at each school.

Southview High School. Southview is a rural Connecticut town with one of the smallest secondary schools in DRG G. Southview's population is about 85% white, and 45% of students across the district were eligible for free and reduced lunch according to the latest available data. Southview has high chronic absenteeism relative to the state average at just above 20% (CSDE, 2019-b).

Southview's music offerings center around robust band and choir programs, and the school employs two full-time music teachers. The band program features traditional Concert, Symphonic, and Jazz bands, and is best known for its highly awarded marching band. Percussion students in the symphonic band also take a separate percussion ensemble class. This program was greatly expanded by a longtime band director who left Southview to teach elsewhere this year, and is now under new leadership. Southview has three choirs that all meet during the school day, including a Concert Choir, Chorale, and select Chamber Singers. Southview students can also take classes in electronic music and piano, although these are only offered in certain semesters and the piano classroom has recently been taken over by another school program. Both entry-level and AP music theory are offered each year, and students also prepare a musical each spring.

Southview participants. I chose to interview Southview's choir teacher, Ron Miller, who has been teaching in the school for twelve years and is mainly responsible for the choirs. He teaches three choirs along with a combination of theory, piano, or digital music courses depending on what is on offer in a given year. I exempted the new band teacher because we were primarily interested in participants who had institutional knowledge of the program. We also interviewed George Davis, the principal at Southview. He has been working at Southview for 26

years, beginning as a substitute teacher before rising to the role of assistant principal and then becoming principal this past year.

Lakeside High School. Lakeside, in contrast with Southview, is one of the largest towns in DRG G. The high school serves a relatively high proportion of nonwhite students at nearly 65%, and also serves a substantial population of English Language Learners. Over 55% of Lakeside students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, and the school also contends with high chronic absenteeism at nearly 30% (CSDE, 2019-a).

Lakeside's music program boasts five full-time teachers and a relatively wide variety of offerings. As one of the largest secondary schools in its DRG, it also has one of the highest numbers of music course enrollments. Most music students are in the band, chorus, or orchestra programs, each of which have multiple ensembles. The choirs include the Chorus, which meets in two sections during the day, and the select Chamber Singers which meets after school. The band program has a large Concert band and a Jazz Band, and just like Southview features a percussion ensemble class as well. The orchestra meets by grade level, and a select Chamber Orchestra practices after school. Lakeside's five teachers also allow them to offer a wide range of non-ensemble courses, including three levels of guitar, two levels of piano, basic and AP Music Theory, and courses in digital music, songwriting, and theatrical design. After school clubs outside of the select ensembles include a handbell choir, a modern band club, student string quartets, a cello ensemble, and a yearly musical.

Lakeside participants. I interviewed three of Lakeside's five teachers. Will Jones, who has taught at Lakeside for 31 years, teaches the chorus classes along with AP music theory, piano, and digital music. He also directs the handbell choir and chamber singers after school. Beth Pawlak is Lakeside's orchestra teacher and is in her 30th year teaching. She has been at

Lakeside for five years and teaches several sections of orchestra along with the after-school chamber orchestra. John Rossi, in his third year at Lakeside and eighth year of teaching, is the youngest music educator on the staff and the only teacher who does not conduct a band, chorus, or orchestra. His schedule consists of two levels of guitar as well as guitar ensemble, digital music, songwriting, and a history of rock course. John started the modern band club, which meets weekly after school. I also interviewed Alice Morrison, the principal at Lakeside. Alice has been at Lakeside for 22 years, both as a math teacher and as an administrator. This is her third year as principal, before which she was an assistant principal for three years. We were unable to make contact with the two band teachers to schedule online interviews once schools were closed due to COVID-19.

Findings

Analysis of the interviews and documents revealed a wide variety of factors that make music programs in these districts more successful and more representative of the communities they serve. The findings are organized in three parts, beginning at the community/district level, then the school level, and then the program level and the strategies of individual educators.

Community Support and Advocacy

Sometimes what happens in the music program might not be super visible to everyone...I think it's important to make sure all stakeholders kind of understand the value that music is bringing to kids' educational experiences, that we don't, in [Lakeside], see it as an add on. So one of my jobs is to advocate and to continue the message that this isn't extra, that this is an integral part of kids' programs should they choose for it to be.

- Alice Morrison, Principal, Lakeside High School

Educators at both schools expressed the importance of visibility and situating their music programs within the broader community. Teachers and administrators alike believed that they had a role to play in making their music programs visible beyond the school walls, and that this visibility was both a marker of success and a key factor in maintaining successful music programs.

At Lakeside, both teachers and the principal consistently acknowledged community support for school music. When asked about the factors that drive Lakeside's music program, Alice expressed the importance of "support by the community—you know, there's certainly interest by parents in having their kids have music be not really like an add on, but part of the day." Beth Pawlak, Lakeside's orchestra teacher, echoed this appreciation:

I think the culture of the community supports it. [Lakeside] has a symphony. [Lakeside] has [a community barbershop chorus], there's a [Lakeside] community chorale...There's [a local music store], there's a lot of music teachers from other districts that live in town. And I think [Lakeside] has had just this history of being very active culturally in the arts, and I think that contributes to the participation in the schools. I think it's just a reflection of the community.

This culture of support for school music appears to be historic as well; John Rossi described his experience growing up in Lakeside before returning to teach there:

One thing is the history that the music program has had in the town. My grandmother grew up right across the street...so I as a child would come over to her house often and there was always a lot of music stuff going on right across the street at the high school.

So even from a young age, I remember Lakeside having a lot of music going on.

This musical culture is part of the identity of Lakeside. Since many residents end up staying there after high school or returning after college, support for both community and school music is passed down through generations.

While educators at Southview were not as vocal about the musical culture of their community, the Southview principal acknowledged the importance of community members as stakeholders in high-level decision making. To preserve a strong music program, he said, “you also have to sell, sometimes to the community at large and sometimes to the larger educational administration that this is a valuable thing and that the research is pretty clear on students and performing arts, especially in terms of math scores and things like that and how it supports everything else.” In fact, both principals viewed advocacy to the broader community as an

important part of their job and believed that they could have influence over district and town-level decisions that affected their music programs.

Teachers also discussed their desire to make their programs visible in the community. Ron Miller, the choir director at Southview, described his select Chamber Singers as “the more public face of the program,” while Lakeside’s program of studies describes performances “outside of high school concerts,” at “school and community events,” and at “community concerts” for ensemble classes. For non-ensemble classes like guitar, piano, or music production, however, appearances in the community are less of an expectation. John Rossi, who teaches guitar and songwriting classes at Lakeside:

The challenge specific to me is that I'm the only one that isn't teaching an ensemble group that's involved in all of the festivals and the field trips and this and that, and I want to build that guitar ensemble to be one of those groups. So I guess the challenge for me is I've never had to create something like that.

For John, the expansion of Lakeside’s music offerings outside of the traditional ensemble courses relies at least partially on the establishment of classes like guitar ensemble in the broader community so that students who are more interested in these classes can have a richer experience within the music program. This kind of teacher initiative was praised by Alice Morrison, who expressed that strong programs come about “when you have people whose goal is to build a program and make it embedded in the community, and are proud of it and really believe it can excel no matter what the DRG is.” For Alice, financial or racial background was no excuse to not build Lakeside’s music program into a community institution.

School Culture

I think if you really look into the roots of education, and you're thinking about education as a humanistic endeavor and as a progressive endeavor, it starts with 'What's interesting for the kids? What are their passions? What do they see their life becoming? What do they see their schooling becoming?' And I think if you use that as a barometer about what you're doing in school, you're not going to go far wrong. - George Davis, Principal, Southview High School

At the school level, teachers and administrators expressed concerns ranging from broad cultural philosophy to the daily minutiae of scheduling. Both teachers and administrators felt that their schools were philosophically and systematically supportive of their music programs.

The two principals were particularly vocal about their implementation of school-level philosophies that they felt helped foster strong music programs. The above quote from George illustrates a mentality that was shared by both principals. They both felt that student concerns should be at the forefront of the decision-making process at the school level. Alice shared a similar sentiment, and also reflected on helping students to identify their strengths:

To give students space to be authentically who they are....And that means that it's our job to understand the worlds they are living in outside of school—their strengths from those worlds. It's really easy sometimes to look at, you know, poor kids or kids where English isn't spoken in the home and only see barriers. And I think if we're doing that we're really missing the big picture. You know, all of our students have a lot of other strengths that they're bringing to the table every day. And we need to help kids identify them in themselves, build confidence around those strengths, and use them to transition into a postsecondary plan they're excited about.

The principals at both schools seemed to believe that this kind of student autonomy over their educational experience required building strong programs in as many areas as possible. They—but not the teachers—also talked extensively about “learning communities,” which have been implemented at both schools and which George said allow students to

pick sort of a quasi-major while they're in high school...And I think the research will show you that if a student can see the through line between what they're doing in school all the way through to what they want to do in their lives, they're more likely to be happy and engaged in schooling.

Alice mentioned “course creation that isn't necessarily music but connected to it” through Lakeside’s Performing Arts and Communications learning community, including collaborations across departments to expand offerings. One of Lakeside’s science teachers, who also directs the school musical, will be teaching a new musical theatre course under the umbrella of this learning community next year. While Alice mentioned some tension between teachers and administration resulting from these learning communities, both principals believed that they give students more control over their education and engage students more deeply across all areas of their schooling experience. As George put it,

As long as you find people that are passionate about their subject area and your interest, there's buy-in, because just like the students, you know, teachers want creative voice and choice within their programming...It's good to offer things that maybe you haven't done in the past to keep things fresh...the students and the teachers learn from each other

Relationships and Belonging. In addition to giving students a richer educational experience, Alice and George also viewed music as an important means for fostering closer

relationships and a sense of belonging among students and teachers. Alice, asked about her most important philosophies as an educator in Lakeside, talked about

Relationships—even when I'm kind of in contact with a student who's really having a hard day, struggling...they might not know me, but I always start by saying, like, 'Who's your person?' So I really believe that [Lakeside] High School's job is to help kids make sure they have several of those people who know them well, who advocate for them and that they can go to when something's not right.

For Alice, supporting Lakeside's music program was one of the ways of furthering her goal that all students “find a way to connect in our building.” George said that supporting music in his school meant that “ultimately you're letting the student decide what's important in their lives and what's going to engage them in school and what's going to be meaningful.”

Several interviewees brought up this notion that music engages students in school more broadly. Ron Miller, choir teacher at Southview, said that his students “know that when they come into the program, they're part of something. And for a lot of them, that's why they come to school half the time.” George agreed, expressing that

the students are much more well engaged and more likely to do better in their other classes...for many of our students, and we're about over a 50% poverty rate, they come and they're engaged because of the the arts programs that we have here, you know, and if I had the, the fiscal resources to do that, my vision would be to expand those programs, you know, exponentially as far as I could.

George also believed that Southview's investment in arts programs over the past several years has a dramatic effect on the culture of the whole school:

If you would have seen what we had 10 years ago before [Ron and former band director Claire] came to now, and the power—just on the strength of our music program, we radically transformed the culture of our school—to be a much more accepting place, you know, where our kids support each other. And I think just the power in that and if I had to put that on one thing I would put it on those programs are bringing the school together. When we do the play, you know, we used to have 15 minutes skits for our plays 20 years ago and now we have these full productions where we have art working together, media working together, and tech working together and that really brings the school together.”

Mechanisms of Support. It is clear that educators at both schools believed that having a strong music program benefited students, and that administrators believed that they had a role to play at the school level to support those programs. But what does that support look like?

Educators at both schools agreed that administrator confidence in music teachers was an important factor. George recounted the progress of Southview’s music program under Ron and Claire, and expressed the importance of seeking out teachers with the vision to expand their music program:

I think your number one factor is the person you bring in and their vision. Both of them came in with a vision that was beyond what we could have predicted for ourselves or what we could see for ourselves...You have to hire the right people that have that vision and let them run with that vision, and try not to kind of constrain them in any way, because we certainly couldn't have predicted what they did here. Everyone said, you know, “it's a small little, it's a small little kind of rural community, and you don't have the talent.” And then years later, you know, we have students in Carnegie Hall and all over

the nation...I think the school side is to support them and their vision and give them the ingredients they need to get that done.

Teachers at Lakeside felt empowered by their administration, as expressed by John:

What I find to be an issue is when there are administrators that think that music is run like any other subject or any other art or any other like, oh, social studies or math, and so they don't understand the needs of music classes. So for ensembles, they don't - the fact that we have a percussion class, like that [band director Angelo] teaches just percussion is crazy. A lot of towns don't do that, like 'No, teach them all at the same time, why can't you do that?' So in [Lakeside] that's become the norm, and it's just what's expected. And in [Lakeside], the administrators will be honest and say, "I don't know that much about music. I'm gonna trust you, the music teachers and the professionals in that area, to let me know what you need, and I just trust you." I've been in places where that isn't the case, and it really hurts the music program because administrators don't understand the needs. They think that they know best overall. And that just is damaging.

Beth agreed, saying that "We feel that they trust us to be the experts in our classroom." In addition to placing her professional trust in her music teachers, Alice expressed her desire to do "everything I can to advocate for the actual money, the schedule, the positions, the extracurriculars. I think that's my job."

Alice was not alone in noting the importance of scheduling. In fact, every educator mentioned the schedule at their school as a challenge to the preservation and expansion of their music program. This naturally included making sure that music classes didn't directly conflict with other classes, especially AP classes that are often single-section and highly desirable for students. George expressed disappointment over students who are

passionate about music, but they're going into another field and they want to go into the college of their choice, and they have to take an AP course because it's weighted higher. So the biggest structural obstacle for us is definitely the schedule and carving out time when students can pick and not have those conflicts during their day.

Beth mentioned that music teachers sometimes have to find creative solutions to scheduling conflicts: "I've had sophomores in freshmen orchestra. I've had sophomores in junior/senior orchestra. I've even had a couple of seniors in the freshman orchestra period. And you know, it works."

Teachers at Lakeside also noted scheduling difficulties with aligning students' experiences over four years. For choir teacher Will Jones, "minimal help probably comes in the form of not having to fight with guidance on a daily basis to put kids in and keep them in, especially if they've done it over and over and over again." John felt that the scheduling process often interfered with students progressing between levels:

That's probably the biggest thing that I've kind of rung my hands out, because I've had so many students come to me with an interest to continue...And the biggest pain in the butt for me has been them coming back to me in like February when they do their schedules and say, 'Oh, my guidance counselor said it wouldn't fit my schedule.' And so then they don't take it. Or it'll be two or three years until they take the next level of guitar, and then they haven't touched a guitar in two or three years...I wish there was more expected continuity...it's gonna be an issue everywhere, and it's been an issue everywhere I've been. Right, guidance, they have their job to do, and they don't know everything, similar to administrators. But yeah, I wish they would communicate more and be more understanding like, 'Hey, we need this—this is our goal for our department.'

Overall, teachers and administrators broadly agreed on both the importance of their music programs within the schools and the mechanisms required at the school level to support those programs. Each player in the community—from administrator to teacher—plays a role. George summed up his role to be all-encompassing, a driving force in providing positive opportunities and experiences for students:

To be an advocate, to be a cheerleader, to listen to the kids about their experience....And again, you're doing this balance across the board as a comprehensive high school, to provide as many opportunities that you can. And sometimes you cannot provide every opportunity a student might like to see, but you can take a swing at it and try and if you try, and you fall down, that's okay. And you get back up and you know...just try to reset and build a better experience going forward.

Program Culture and Strategies

Our kids, they take a lot of pride in what goes on...You've seen the crowd outside the orchestra room door every morning, some kids get there at 7, some kids get there before but there is a crowd of probably sometimes close to 30 kids between 7 and 7:30 in the morning just, you know, sitting there, eating their breakfast, catching up on their homework, just talking - and it's just such a place where they come to feel comfortable, to feel welcome, to feel like they have a place to belong, to feel like if they don't have any other place to go that that's a safe spot, a safe place...They take care of their space, they take care of the equipment, they take care of the stage, they just look out for one another.

- Beth Pawlak, Orchestra Teacher, Lakeside High School

Teachers and administrators talked extensively about the culture, offerings, and goals of their music programs. Questions of representation were especially salient in these discussions, related to both access to participation opportunities and the diversity of class content.

A broad theme of the music program as a welcoming and safe place emerged across both schools. To Alice, the music wing was “the space that you can kind of be authentically be yourself and try new things.” Will mentioned a similar idea, but also expressed that “that doesn't mean that we're fun and games—I really don't think we are—but we're doing something worthwhile. And we're all doing it together. And we're all approaching it from different angles.” Just as principals regarded the inclusivity and sense of belonging as an important piece in the life of their schools, teachers viewed it as a defining characteristic of their program culture, right alongside skill-building and content. Ron shared a sentiment echoed by several of the music educators:

Especially in our district, and districts like ours, a lot of the kids don't necessarily have the same support at home...And you know, sometimes—well, more often than not, I should say—they really just want someone to be there for them. And that's what we have...I spend more of my time talking to kids and giving them advice and helping them through problems outside of the classroom than I do some days rehearsing. Or at least that's the way that it feels.

Ron also noted that he felt less prepared to act in this role when he came out of college, saying that his “perspective has changed” as he’s gotten older and progressed in his career. Now, he attempts to foster a “family atmosphere” in his classroom. An important part of how Ron works to build this culture has to do with how he situates the competitive aspects of music:

You can't have a music program completely devoid of competition. But for us it's not...I don't make it competitive in a negative way. We've got the chamber choir auditions, you know...But I don't—how do I say it? I make it very clear that it's not the 15 to 20 best singers in the program that get in. It's the 15 to 20 singers that show good musical skill, also that I know will work well together, that are fully committed to the program. And I tell them that I need to make sure that I have musical leadership still in the chorale.

To Ron, progression between the various choirs wasn't just a matter of dividing students by musical ability, but rather a method of giving as many students as possible a place to contribute to the music program in a positive way. He regularly tells his students that they aren't competing with each other, and fulfills that message with an audition process where students help each other prepare and audition together:

In other schools I see it work where, you know, it's very isolated, the kids are prepping on their own. They go in and they're trying to beat the other kids for a spot. For us, the kids are all helping each other through the audition process. They're working together. Current members that have to re-audition are helping new kids learn the material, so that they can all audition side by side, knowing full well that they could be helping prepare a kid that takes their spot....So I think that speaks to... the feeling—in the program that they're all there to help each other and not tear each other down, but lift each other up. So that just contributes into the family atmosphere and having a place.

Ron didn't view this effort to create community within his program as just a tool to draw more students in. He believed that the way in which he interacted with students was very impactful for some:

I've got kids in, you know, especially the larger groups that if they're in another class in the school, you know, they may be kicked out of that class every day and sent to the office or they may have writeups left and right from other teachers, but yet they can come and be productive in my room and not have that same issue...And I'm not going to pick a fight with a kid. And there are teachers that do that. You know, I try to make an effort to really get to know each kid. And, you know, especially with the kids that are at risk, the behavior problem kids emotionally disturbed kids, you know, all you have to do is invest in those kids and show them that you're while you understand what their underlying issue may be, or, or whatever they they may be bringing to the table, that there's a way that they can make themselves successful in your room.

In addition to creating a welcoming and affirming culture, teachers discussed instructional philosophies that they felt helped sustain their music programs. Will mentioned the importance of differentiating for students who might participate over multiple years, saying that “you have to have a plan in place for how you want students to develop over their four years... a lot of programs run aground of that, because they don't differentiate for the older students.” Students who remain in Will's chorus class progress through a four-year musicianship curriculum that he developed and can eventually step into a leadership role or peer tutoring position that “comes with responsibilities and academic challenges of its own.” Will also indicated that his classroom instruction time was often loosely structured, especially during “lesson time” when students work collaboratively on music theory and aural skills:

....in music class, I think the big misconception for somebody would be how can something....honestly, so controlled, look so chaotic. I've had people walk in at lesson time. And there are kids doing, there are 30 kids working on 15 tasks at the same time.

And it looks like just rush hour in a train station. But they're all getting stuff done. You just have to kind of see past the chaos. Because the idea of creation is never quiet and it's never organized. It has to be kind of messy and it has to be a little loud.

Regardless of classroom instructional set up and structure, teachers at both schools spoke to the importance of a collaborative atmosphere in striving to build a community of music students within their school. John was particularly emphatic about the collaborative nature of one of his non-traditional offerings: the modern band club.

Despite spending several weeks observing the Lakeside music program, I was not aware of the modern band club before my interview with John. I hadn't seen advertisements or photos for the club, which meets after school on Thursdays, and it does not appear alongside the handbell choir and chamber singers in the brochure of student clubs posted on the Lakeside website. Given John's previously mentioned thoughts regarding the difficulties of creating community visibility for music classes outside of the typical performing ensembles, this may not be especially surprising. Despite the relative lack of external exposure and reinforcing experiences for this club and his other less traditional music offerings when compared with the large ensembles, John describes a thriving, collaborative environment where students control the content and take power over their own learning:

Kind of like social constructivist—they work together to learn songs...they're student leaders, they will learn multiple parts, they will print out chord charts, whatever—like the sheets that they need, they'll teach the other students, they're really welcoming when new people come in, and it's kind of its own culture now, and that's really exciting for me....So we have a group, sometimes we'll have eight, sometimes we'll have 20 kids be there, with the goal of ultimately performing. And so what we'll do is as a group we'll talk

about, and like vote on the next song that we're going to learn the following week, or for the following week, and during the week, it's their responsibility to go learn their parts.

I'll go find resources, and I'll post it on Google Classroom....So it's kind of different, but it's awesome at the same time.

The modern band club also helped to expand Lakeside's music program to students who might not otherwise participate in school music. He noticed that his participants include "a lot of kids that are not music kids, which is awesome for me...I'm seeing that and I'm really glad that it is that way because, you know, as the music program, we want to try to reach everybody." John felt that this effect extended to other non-ensemble music classes as well, and that while learning to teach classes like digital music was a "learning curve," he strongly believed that the difficult work of diversifying course offerings was valuable. Having experienced teachers in the department like Will and band director Richard, both of whom have been at Lakeside for over 30 years, gave John "a lot of experience to kind of pull from" and helped him to feel supported in teaching new courses for the first time. He described his desire to become an arts administrator and encourage more course offerings outside of the traditional ensembles:

Absolutely, I would encourage a lot more of everything. Because, you know, as a music educator, we want to reach the most people that we can. We're only going to reach so much if we have the traditional band, chorus, orchestra where if you're in high school and you don't know how to read music or play an instrument, well, you're kind of out of luck, because that's like, 'Oh, well, we learn instruments in elementary or middle school.' So having alternate non-traditional courses is a way to reach more students. So of course, I'd love to do that.

Alice was encouraged by the belonging that students found in Lakeside's music program, and agreed with John that offerings like guitar and modern band involved "students who maybe wouldn't sign up for a full orchestra or chorus or band class." However, she expressed concern that while after-school activities like modern band expanded the music program to serve more students, they weren't accessible for everyone:

We know there are obstacles just in terms of after school participation. So we have a lot of teenagers who go to work, who take care of siblings, you know, in that music wing. So our strength is also—that culture is also kind of built after school, kids hanging in the wing for the musical or for [chamber singers] practice or for sectionals. So if you're unable to do those things, how do we kind of give you that opportunity?

This lack of opportunity and the imbalances it aggravated were important to Alice. She believed that "representation is no doubt an issue, you know...there are places right now where there are not enough, not a proportionate amount of students of color." Out of all the participants, Alice also expressed the most concern over the content taught in music classes and whether or not students of all races and backgrounds felt that they were reflected in the curriculum.

I can picture a few singers, girls of color in grades 11 and 12. If I were to sit down and have a really honest conversation about like, 'what else would you guys have wanted to sing in chorus?' That's something we could do better at and I should be doing. You know, the same balance or tension exists in literature, you know, like how much Shakespeare do you read versus like a newer author? So on I think helping from a choral angle to make sure that that we're celebrating, you know...composers that represent our kids too.

Alice felt that her role extended beyond acknowledging and encouraging diversity. She summarized her thoughts on access to music for all students at Lakeside:

I think more than celebrating the diversity it's our job to bring down any systemic barriers that are in place for students, specifically kids who are traditionally underrepresented, whether it be at the college level, whether it be kids of color.

When asked how the music program at Lakeside had changed over her years working there, Alice began talking about a few issues she saw in the program—slightly declining band enrollment, a racial imbalance—and then broke off, saying “so I'm kind of answering issues versus how they've changed, which might be part of why there is an issue.”

In addition to curricular concerns, educators at both schools identified systemic barriers at the student level that made it more difficult to sustain their music programs. These were primarily financial. Ron mentioned that many Southview students “may not be able to afford private instruction,” a sentiment that was shared at Lakeside. John wished that Lakeside could purchase guitar cases so that his guitar students could “rent the guitars ...and that might change how the classes actually run day to day, but I want to give students the opportunity to rent a guitar if they would like to.” He felt that this would allow students to achieve more in his guitar classes and expand their musical learning, and for him to spend less class time on individual practice.

Alice expressed concern about access to music programs below the secondary level:

I think there's probably barriers at the elementary and middle school levels that are impacting us, whether that's access to instruments, access to kind of like instructional support in terms of instruments. You know, I imagine there are communities where kids are kind of taking private lessons on our instruments from young ages....Because as you know, it's also hard for a kid to pick up their saxophone for the first time in ninth grade. So maybe a lack of like a really strong [grades] 4-6 or 4-7 program that brings those

barriers away—‘here, here you go is an instrument, here is a summer program, here is some additional instruction.’ So those probably impact us too.

Beth was aware of these concerns, but believed that teachers across the Lakeside district were already at work breaking down these barriers. She expressed confidence that “we’ll provide an instrument for anybody that wants one. I think in the elementary school, they purchase all the books. I think, honestly I don’t think there’s anything that’s preventing kids from actually participating in our program.”

Overall, the teachers and administrators believed that their music programs were welcoming and fostered a close community of students. The teachers felt that their classrooms didn’t always look like the kind of well-ordered rehearsals typically found in college music programs, but that some lack of formality was necessary for student growth and building the program culture they wanted. Lakeside educators, particularly John and Alice, were concerned with cultural representation in the music program, but all the educators shared thoughts on the barriers that might prevent students from participating in music.

Summary

Participants felt that factors at the community, school, and program levels affected their ability to build strong music programs in their districts. Advocacy, community-building, course offerings, and instructional strategies were among the main themes that emerged from the data. The teachers and principals at these two schools seemed to enjoy talking about this topic, and all expressed optimistic views on the future potential for preserving and growing their music programs. While all participants acknowledged cultural, financial, or administrative difficulties in expanding access to music to all students, they also shared a variety of strategies for overcoming these barriers.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Connections to Literature

This study aimed to identify and illustrate the various practices, philosophies, and cultures that support access to music learning in two diverse, low socioeconomic (DRG G) Connecticut high schools. Educators from these two schools shared a wide range of factors that they felt affected their ability to make their music programs more accessible to all students.

Despite the fact that the two schools serve low socioeconomic diverse populations and are among the lowest district reference groups in the state (DRGs), I found thriving music programs where large numbers of students participated in multiple course offerings.

National Policy. While researchers have investigated the effects of national-level policy on both participation and representation in music (Abril and Gault, 2008; Elpus, 2014), most participants in this study did not mention federal or state policy as a leading factor in the rise or fall of their music programs. Just as Abril and Bannerman (2015) found, music teachers were much more likely to focus on factors at the school and district level like scheduling. While national policy may affect decisions at lower levels, teachers seemed to believe that the most important decisions were still in the hands of school boards, central administration, and school-level administrators. George, the principal at Southview, was the only participant to mention policy at the national level, and his outlook supported a focus on lower-level decision making:

So I think traditionally in education, you get a top down perspective. So you get policies, things started in Washington and funneled through the State Department of Ed....But again, you're moving away from test scores, and you're looking at the whole student and the whole child and what's important to them, you're not going to go far wrong. So I like

to have things happen from the bottom up and it to be more organic and grassroots-driven rather than top down with some kind of onerous-type policies that aren't always in the best interest of students.

George echoed the findings of several researchers (Spohn, 2008; West, 2012) who found that a focus on testing and accountability had a generally negative effect on music programs. While the specific mechanisms that lead to national-level policy affecting student-level participation are unclear, administrator attitudes likely play a role in effects like the changes in representation under NCLB examined by researchers like Elpus (2014).

Financial Barriers. The influence of finances on students' ability to participate in music is a frequent topic for researchers, and one that came up in several interviews. Alice echoed Bates (2012) in saying that the ability to pay for instrument rentals and supplies affected participation from the beginning of music study in elementary school. While Beth, Lakeside's orchestra teacher, suggested that teachers across all grade levels would make exceptions to these financial burdens for students in need, Alice's continued worry about the issue suggests that obstacles still exist.

In addition to instruments and supplies, activities outside the classroom like festivals and tours constitute an important part of the traditional ensemble experience for many students and are often seen as hallmarks of successful and well-supported music programs. George justifiably took pride in "having students in Carnegie Hall and all over the nation"—in offering the kinds of reinforcing experiences that appear to positively influence participation rates for students who are able to take part (Demorest, Kelley, & Pfordresher, 2017). These experiences, however, are expensive for families. Administrators maintained that the cost of purchasing instruments already makes funding music programs an expensive endeavor, so it is unfortunately likely that taking on

additional cost to benefit individual students is not a viable solution for most districts. However, teachers and students in these schools implemented near-constant fundraising efforts to reduce these barriers. Despite indications that music teachers thought about finances and funding for their programs and that many students had to fundraise extensively, it seemed that teachers were inclined to allow music-making experiences to drive decision-making rather than finances for as many students as possible. At the same time, Beth indicates that they would accommodate and support students on a case-by-case basis.

Alice's vision of inclusivity for Lakeside's music program was, as she said, "more than celebrating the diversity"—it also involved an active effort to break down the financial barriers that reduce both access to and positive reinforcement of music participation for her students. However, one might argue that the very nature of asking for a financial exception may be a barrier for some students and parents. Families may not know about case-by-case accommodations for financial obligations, or may not be inclined to admit that affording participation in musical experiences is an infeasible burden.

Program Offerings and Lived Experiences. Researchers have suggested that courses outside of the traditional ensemble offerings such as guitar, modern band, and music production may help to reduce barriers for students from a cultural perspective (Thibeault, 2015; Williams, 2011). Educators at Lakeside, particularly John, who teaches guitar, songwriting, and the modern band club, were actively exploring this possibility. While Lakeside's performing ensembles are highly regarded in the community and around the area, John described a segment of Lakeside's music program that thrived independently from these groups.

New Offerings. As the only teacher who does not conduct an ensemble, and having worked to start new programs outside of the band, chorus, and orchestra domains, John lamented

that “music education programs have been so like—and it's not good or bad—But it's been very the same for so long.” He described his efforts to teach “some of the music and culture from today, more recently,” and believed that this would help to reach a wider range of students. John’s desire to teach more culturally relevant content echoed Williams’s (2011) assertion that music is often experienced in very different ways in and outside of school contexts. Alice agreed, expressing that John’s offerings helped the music program to involve “students who maybe wouldn't sign up for a full orchestra or chorus or band class.” The success experienced by Alice and John lends support to authors like Kratus (2007), who argued that “the nature of music education should reflect the cultural and social milieu in which it exists.”

While the participants felt that these programs were successful, John expressed some frustration in creating new offerings outside of traditional ensembles. The first is that most teacher candidates spend almost all their teacher preparation work—99% in Wang & Humphreys’s (2009) case study—on Western music. This nearly exclusive focus contributes to the “learning curve” that John experienced when he first taught digital music and likely affects many music educators’ tendencies to focus on traditional music course offerings once they become teachers (Herbert, 2011).

However, Lakeside’s implementation of offerings like the modern band club and the guitar ensemble required more than just willing educators. John said that being the only one not to teach band, chorus, or orchestra meant that “the challenge specific to me is that I'm the only one that isn't teaching an ensemble group that’s involved in all of the festivals and the field trips and this and that.” When Bates (2012) wrote that “the markers for success in music education— participation in select ensembles, first-chair placements, leading roles, high scores at festival— will be reserved for middle-class and affluent students” (p. 34), he was referring to the gap in

private instructional opportunities for students who could not afford them. However, John's comments illustrate that, as music education exists right now, these "markers for success" are also reserved for students who participate in band, chorus, or orchestra. If Demorest, Kelley, & Pfordresher (2017) were correct in claiming that experiences like festivals and travel act as reinforcers of musical self-concept and help to drive continued participation in music, then John's guitar students may be less likely to continuously maintain involvement in the music program than band, chorus, or orchestra students. If offerings like John's guitar classes and modern band club are indeed appealing to a different segment of Lakeside's student population than the traditional ensembles, this raises equity concerns and may point to one of the reasons for demographic imbalances in music programs.

Ensemble Courses. While this would seem to lend credence to Williams's (2011) assertion that the large performing ensemble model is out of touch, it is important to give voice to the ensemble teachers and administrators who disagreed with this assessment. While Williams (2007) argued that ensemble classes often do not teach skills that are usable beyond graduation for non-professional musicians, Will, the choir teacher at Lakeside, felt that,

I'd like to think that I'm instilling sort of lifelong discipline lessons through the teaching of the arts. If you have the self discipline and the control, to practice, to learn new things, to take what you have and expand on them—that, that's transcendent, that works everywhere.

Alice agreed from her perspective as an administrator:

The community piece, the collaboration, those are skills they can take with them wherever they go, you know, so I, in similar ways to kind of what athletes learn from

teams - I think our kids are learning that everyday down there...even if they never do any music professionally.

Both teachers and administrator participants broadly agreed that ensemble classes were beneficial experiences for students and could be taught in such a way as to foster lifelong collaborative skills. Recalling Will's descriptions of collaborative, peer-led lesson time in his chorus classes, it seems that his teaching style and the way in which he structured class time were important to creating these extramusical takeaways for students. As Will summarized it, "we don't just focus on 'what are we singing on the next concert?'" Diversifying course offerings remains essential, but this does lend support to Hedgecoth & Major's (2018) finding that an additive approach where new offerings exist alongside established traditional ensembles may be effective for many schools.

Even if Lakeside's ensemble courses do teach lifelong skills, Alice was concerned about the content taught in those classes. Thibeault (2015) raised concerns about the lack of alignment between students' in-school and out-of-school musical experiences, and Alice echoed this sentiment:

You know, we have another like subset of kids...who probably have a strong church-based music background or gospel music background or you know—are we fully tapping that crowd of singers?

Involving all students in music, to Alice, required having "really honest conversation[s]" about the topics of representation and curricular diversity. This illustrated one of the findings of a 2018 report compiled by the Lakeside school district and an educational equity organization, that "students, staff, & families are eager to have conversations about racial identity and other identities they hold" (RE Center, p. 9). Alice viewed honest dialogue about representation in

curriculum as an essential part of her role in “helping kids who maybe haven't seen themselves as musicians to find some kind of entryway into that world.”

Site Comparison. My interpretation of the findings does not suggest that one of these music programs is better, or serves students in better or more effective ways. Rather, the educators at both schools sought to serve the needs of their communities. Lakeside’s teachers are at work on dynamic and diverse curricular strategies, while educators at Southview focused more on meeting the social-emotional needs of students and building a supportive community within their music program. At both schools, teachers and principals displayed a conception of education that was driven by the interests and needs of students. As George put it, “looking at the whole student and the whole child and what's important to them, you're not going to go far wrong.”

Application to Practice

The findings of this study suggest several applications that may help teachers and administrators make their music programs more successful in serving all students. These applications address teaching practices and institutional cultures that support school music access. They are given as a bulleted list to allow educators to easily consider their implementation:

- **Relationships and collaboration.** Teachers and principals widely expressed the importance of actively forming relationships with students and fostering a sense of belonging within their music program. Both principals viewed their schools’ music programs as a way to engage students more deeply in their broader school experience. Teachers emphasized creating a collaborative, rather than competitive culture that avoids favoring students with financial or experiential advantages and expressed the importance

of their role as a mentor for students. As Ron said, “they really just want someone to be there for them.”

- **Instructional Strategies.** Music teachers broadly felt that avoiding the didactic model of most collegiate rehearsals helped with both their classroom management and the culture of their program. Will and John felt that including more collaborative time in their lessons, during which the teacher acts as a facilitator for student-driven inquiry, empowered students as both learners and peer leaders.
- **Professional Confidence.** Music educators felt that they could be most successful when they were trusted by their administration to be the professionals in their content area. Teaching only percussionists from the band for a whole period may seem unusual to some principals, but music teachers at the two participant sites were empowered to offer whatever they believed to be best for their program and their students. This also extended to the relationship between music departments and guidance departments. Music teachers felt that better aligning their offerings over multiple years with the support of guidance counselors would create a better experience for students.
- **Creating Visibility Outside the Ensemble.** The findings pointed toward a need for more reinforcing experiences like festivals, trips, and community events for courses outside the band, chorus, and orchestra. This may help create a richer experience for students outside the ensembles and also to secure support for nontraditional music offerings in the school and broader community.
- **Thoughtful Advocacy.** Teachers and administrators expressed a wide variety of benefits for students who participate in music. While some did believe that music participation led to better performance in other subjects, this was by way of more significant engagement

with schooling in general rather than the cognitive narratives sometimes employed by music advocates. Music advocacy efforts might be better served by illustrating the community-based nature of school music education and the potential effects of music involvement on both student engagement and school culture.

- **Seeking Opportunities for Dialogue.** Alice felt that having conversations with students about culture and representation was an important part of moving forward on these issues. She believed that creating honest dialogue was the best way to ensure that students could see their backgrounds and interests reflected in their schooling.

Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations of this study result from both the available data and the relatively narrow scope. While this study focused on teacher and administrator voices in an attempt to detail the philosophies behind music programs, student voices would be extremely valuable in learning more about the motivations that student participation in music. Other studies, such as Elpus and Abril's (2019) national profile of high school music students, have linked student-level race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic data to course participation and identified several interesting trends; Interview-based case study methods like those used in this study may help illustrate the specific causes behind these trends. Additional research at the student level may also help to further humanize the discourse around barriers to access and provide actionable findings for music educators. The negative effects of some national policy changes on representation in music programs observed by Elpus (2014) coupled with the observed tendency of teachers and administrators to focus on school- and district-level decision-making also indicate a need for more research into the specific mechanisms by which school- and district-level decision-makers are affected by national policies. This may help further illustrate the connections between

national policy and lived experiences at the student level, and may indicate areas of policy improvement that could improve access to music in schools.

This study examined two secondary schools in one district reference group, in one state. Additionally, music educators in both of these schools felt that they enjoyed supportive relationships with their principals and that their programs were successful. Further research in this area should expand to include more schools across the state, region, and country, and may make use of comparative methodologies to illustrate differences between schools that serve varied populations. Comparative research that includes struggling music programs or schools in which music teachers lack administrative support would also be useful in defining best practices for improving music access in all schools, for all students.

References

- Abril, C. R., & Bannerman, J. K. (2015). Perceived factors impacting school music programs: The teacher's perspective. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 62(4), 344-361. DOI: 10.1177/0022429414554430
- Abril, C. R., & Gault, B. M. (2008). The state of music in secondary schools: The principal's perspective. *Journal of Research in Music Education* 56(1), 68-81. DOI: 10.1177/0022429408317516
- Albertson, M. P. (2015). Music teacher educators address diversity in the university (Doctoral dissertation). Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY.
- Barone, J. (2017, December 4). A Symphony Breathes Life Into 400 Broken School Instruments. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/>
- Bates, V. C. (2012). Social class and school music. *Music Educators Journal*, 98(4), 33-37. DOI: 10.1177/0027432112442944
- Bates, V. C. (2017). Critical social class theory for music education. *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, 18(7).
- Bernard, C. F., & Abramo, J. M. (2020). Barriers to access and university schools of music: A collective case study of urban high school students of color and their teachers. *Bulletin for the Council of Research in Music Education*, 226.
- Bernard, C. F., & Cayari, C. C. (2020). Encouraging participatory music making through differentiation on the ukulele. *General Music Today*.
- Bloch, S. (2018, May 13). In New York High Schools, the Sound of Music Is Muted. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/>

- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. London: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Crooke, A. H. D., & McFerran, K. S. (2014). Recommendations for the investigation and delivery of music programs aimed at achieving psychosocial wellbeing benefits in mainstream schools. *Australian Journal of Music Education* 2014(1), 15-37.
- Connecticut State Department of Education. (2019-a). School Profile and Performance Report for School Year 2017-2018: Manchester High School.
- Connecticut State Department of Education. (2019-b). School Profile and Performance Report for School Year 2017-2018: Plainfield High School.
- Demorest, S. M., Kelley, J. & Pfordresher, P. Q. (2017). Singing ability, musical self-concept, and future music participation. *Journal of Research in Music Education* 64(4) 405-420. DOI: 10.1177/0022429416680096
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2005). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Edgar, S. & McGuire, A. (2018). Doing a lot with a little: Navigating a limited budget at a small school. *Illinois Music Educator*, 78(3).
- Elpus, K. (2007). Improving music education advocacy. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 108(3) 13-18, DOI: 10.3200/AEPR.108.3.13-18
- Elpus, K (2013). Is it the music or is it selection bias? A nationwide analysis of music and non-music students' SAT scores. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 61(2), 175-194. DOI: 10.1177/0022429413485601

- Elpus, K. (2013). Music in U.S. federal education policy: Estimating the effect of "core status" for music. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 114(1), 13-24. DOI: 10.1080/10632913.2013.744242
- Elpus, K. (2014). Evaluating the effect of No Child Left Behind on U.S. music course enrollments. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 62(3), 215-233. DOI: 10.1177/0022429414530759
- Elpus, K., & Abril, C. R. (2011). High school music ensemble students in the United States: A demographic profile. *Journal of Research in Music Education* 59(2), 128-145. DOI: 10.1177/0022429411405207
- Elpus, K. and Abril, C. R. (2019). Who enrolls in high school music? A national profile of U.S. Students, 2009-2013. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 67(3), 323-338. DOI: 10.1177/0022429419862837
- Every Student Succeeds Act, 114 U.S.C. § 114-195. (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov/essa>
- Fermanich, M. L. (2011). Money for music education: A district analysis of the how, what, and where of spending for music education. *Journal of Education Finance*, 37(2), 130-149.
- Glesne, C. (2015). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon.
- Harris, L. J. (2019). Does music matter? A look at the issues and the evidence. *Developmental Neuropsychology*, 44(1), 104-145. DOI: 10.1080/87565641.2016.1274316
- Hedgecoth, D. M., & Major, M. (2018). Revisioning and reinstating: Music education after the Great Recession. *Arts Education Policy Review*. DOI: 10.1080/10632913.2018.1468838

- Herbert, D. G. (2011). Originality and institutionalization: Factors engendering resistance to popular music pedagogy in the U.S.A.. *Music Education Research International*, 5, 12-21.
- Kos Jr., R. P. (2018) Music education and the well-rounded education provision of the Every Student Succeeds Act: A critical policy analysis. *Arts Education Policy Review* 119(4) 204-216. DOI: 10.1080/10632913.2017.1327383
- Kratus, J. (2007). Music education at the tipping point. *Music Educators Journal*, 94(2), 42-48.
- Major, M. L. (2013). How they decide: A case study examining the decision-making process for keeping or cutting music in a k-12 public school district. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 61(1) 5-25. DOI: 10.1177/0022429412474313
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G.B. (1995). *Designing qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- McFerran, K. S., Crooke, A. H. D., & Bolger, L. (2017). Promoting engagement in school through tailored music programs. *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, 18(3).
- Merriam, S.B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Miksza, P. (2010). Investigating relationships between participation in high school music ensembles and extra-musical outcomes: An analysis of the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 using a bioecological development model. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 186.
- Miksza, P. (2013). Arts education advocacy: The relative effects of school-level influences on resources for arts education. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 114(1), 25-32. DOI: 10.1080/10632913.2013.744245

- National Association for Music Education (n.d.-a). *Everything ESSA*. Retrieved from <https://nafme.org/advocacy/essa/>
- National Association for Music Education (n.d.-b). *Mission Statement*. Retrieved from <https://nafme.org/about/mission-and-goals/mission-statement/>
- National Association for Music Education (n.d.-c). *Music Education and Academic Achievement*. Retrieved from <https://nafme.org/advocacy/what-to-know/music-education-and-academic-achievement>
- Prowda, Peter (2006). *District Reference Groups, 2006*. Connecticut State Department of Education.
- Rajan, R. S. (2016). Funding music. *General Music Today*, 30(1), 30-37. DOI: 10.1177/1048371316649641
- RE Center, Race & Equity in Education & Manchester Public Schools (2018). The Equity-Informed School Climate Assessment (EISCA) of Manchester Public Schools (MPS).
- Salvador, K., & Allegood, K. (2014). Access to music education with regard to race in two urban areas. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 115, 82-92. DOI: 10.1080/10632913.2014.914389
- Slater, J., Strait, D. L., Skoe, E., O'Connell, S., Thompson, E., & Kraus, N. (2014). Longitudinal effects of group music instruction on literacy skills in low-income children. *PLoS ONE* 9(11), e113383. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0113383
- Spohn, C. (2008). Teacher perspectives on no child left behind and arts education: A case study. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 109(4), 3-12. DOI: 10.3200/AEPR.109.4.3-12
- Thibeault, M. D. (2015). Music education for all through participatory ensembles. *Music Educators Journal*, 102(2), 54-61. DOI: 10.1177/0027432115610170

- Thibeault, M. D., & Evoy, J. (2011). Building your own musical community: How YouTube, Miley Cyrus, and the ukulele can create a new kind of ensemble. *General Music Today*, 24(3), 44-52.
- Tobias, E. S. (2015). Crossfading music education: Connections between secondary students' in- and out-of-school music experience. *International Journal of Music Education*, 33(1), 18-35. DOI: 10.1177/0255761413515809
- Wang, J., & Humphreys, J. T. (2009). Multicultural and popular music content in an American music teacher education program. *International Journal of Music Education*, 27(1), 19-36. DOI: 10.1177/0255761408099062
- West, C. (2012). Teaching music in an era of high-stakes testing and budget reductions. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 113, 75-79. DOI: 10.1080/10632913.2012.656503
- Williams, D. A. (2007). What are music educators doing and how well are we doing it?. *Music Educators Journal*, 94(1), 18-23. DOI: 10.1177/002743210709400105
- Williams, D. A. (2011). The elephant in the room. *Music Educators Journal*, 98(1), 51-57. DOI: 10.1177/0027432111415538
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Dear [Name of teacher/administrator],

Cara Bernard and Jonah Garcia are conducting a study to investigate pedagogies, practices, and policies that music teachers and their administrators implement at the high school level and invite your participation. You are not required to participate in this study. However, if you would like to participate, the interview will last for about a half hour. We will ask you questions about the policies, routines, and practices you use in your classroom or school.

If you would like to participate, please read the attached consent form. If you agree to the requirements in the consent form, please sign them and return to us. Once returned to us, we will contact you to schedule a time for the interviews.

If you would like more information, please feel free to email us:

Sincerely,
Cara Bernard
cara.bernard@uconn.edu
(860) 486-5444

Jonah Garcia
jonah.garcia@uconn.edu
(860) 706-9908

Appendix B: Consent Form

Principal Investigator: Cara Bernard

Student Researcher: Jonah Garcia

Study Title: Teaching Practices, Institutional Culture, and Access to Music Learning

Overview of the Research

You are being asked to provide consent to participate in a research study. Your participation is voluntary. You can say yes or no. If you say yes now you can still change your mind later. Some key points to consider are summarized in this overview, but you should consider all of the information in this document carefully before making your decision.

- This research is being done to better understand the practices, attitudes, and institutional cultures behind successful music programs in two Connecticut high schools. We are interested in identifying what practices and policies afford a successful music program in locations with particular socioeconomic demographics, particularly in District Reference Group (DRG) G.
- The research questions that frame this study are:
 1. What are the pedagogies and practices that music teachers implement to provide and enforce these offerings policies and them accessible?
 2. How do institutional culture, program offerings, and school policies drive access to and participation in music programs?
- Participation will involve approximately 30 minutes of your time. You will be interviewed about teaching practices, attitudes, and policies that help to build successful music programs. You will be asked questions about daily routines and tools you use. You can choose not to answer any question. Some of the questions in the interview may also cause you to feel upset. Risks are described in more detail later in this form.

A more detailed description of this research follows.

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study to identify the practices, attitudes, and policies of successful music teachers and administrators in two Connecticut high schools. You are being asked to participate because you are a teacher or administrator at a high school in CT DRG G with a highly successful music program. Your participation is voluntary. You can say yes or no.

If you say yes now you can still change your mind later. Some key points to consider are summarized in this overview, but you should consider all of the information in this document carefully before making your decision.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this research study is to identify the practices, attitudes, and policies of successful music teachers and administrators in two Connecticut high schools.

What are the study procedures? What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview with the principal investigators, Cara Bernard and Jonah Garcia.

Interview

- The investigators will contact you via email to schedule an interview.
- Each interview will last about 30 minutes.
- Interviews can be conducted in a location and at a time that is convenient for you.
- Interviews will be audio recorded on GarageBand and will then be transferred to a password-protected USB drive.
- You will be asked questions about the strategies used in your school to support a successful music program. Teachers will be asked about their classroom practices, and all participants will be asked about their attitudes, priorities, and policies regarding the music program in their school.

What are the risks or inconveniences of the study?

There is the risk of discomfort that may result with discussing your experiences in your program with the investigators. This discomfort is no different than the risks of any other conversation about your experiences as an educator. This risk is minimal.

In addition, a possible inconvenience may be the time it takes to complete the study, approximated at one half-hour per interview.

What are the benefits of the study?

There are no known benefits to participation in this study.

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may provide insight regarding successful strategies for teachers and administrators of high school music programs.

Will I receive payment for participation? Are there costs to participate?

There are no costs and you will not be paid to be in this study.

How will my personal information be protected?

The following procedures will be used to protect the confidentiality of your data.

- The researcher will keep all study records (including any codes to your data) locked in a secure location.
- Research records will be labeled with a code. The code will be derived from a number selected from a sequential 3-digit code that reflects how many people have enrolled in the study. A master key that links names and codes will be maintained in a separate and secure location. The master key and audiotapes will be destroyed after five years. The PI will keep transcriptions of the interviews for five years before destroying them, although your name will not be attached to these files.
- All electronic files (e.g., database, spreadsheet, recordings, etc.) containing identifiable information will be password protected. Any computer hosting such files will also have password protection to prevent access by unauthorized users.
- Only the members of the research staff will have access to the passwords. Data that will be shared with others will be coded as described above to help protect your identity. At the conclusion of this study, the researchers may publish their findings.
- Information will be presented in summary format and you will not be identified in any publications or presentations.
- We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.
- Study data will be released to the student investigator's honors advisor and the UConn Honors Program for submission of an honors thesis. All participants will be assigned a pseudonym and no other personal information will be released.

You should also know that the UConn Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Research Compliance Services may inspect study records as part of its auditing program, but these reviews will only focus on the researchers and not on your responses or involvement. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Can I stop being in the study and what are my rights?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate.

You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer.

Whom do I contact if I have questions about the study?

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. We will be happy to answer any questions you have about this study. If you have further questions about this study or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the principal investigator, Cara Bernard, (860) 486-5444, or the student researcher, Jonah Garcia, (860) 706-9908. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 860-486-8802.

Documentation of Consent:

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I have received a copy of this consent form.

Participant Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

Signature of Person

Print Name:

Date:

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview questions

1. Tell me a little bit about your music program. I see you offer a number of classes. What do you teach, and how long have you taught at your school?
2. You seem to have quite a thriving music program here. What do you think are the main factors that drive the success of your music program?
Follow up questions:
 - a. What are the priorities and goals of your music program?
 - b. How would you describe the culture of your music program?
3. What strategies or practices do you find to be particularly effective when working with students from your district?
Follow up question:
 - a. What do you understand about working with your students that someone from outside your school might not? What characteristics of your students are most important to how you go about your work?
4. How has your music program changed since you started working at your school?
5. Is there anything you would change about your course offerings or the material you teach/that is taught in music classes?
6. What would say are some of the obstacles that could prevent students from participating in music?
7. What are some of your biggest challenges in sustaining a strong music program in your district?
8. What do you see your role as in continuing to sustain such a successful program?

Appendix D: Interview Transcriptions

Alice Morrison, Principal, Lakeside High School

JG: So for starters, just tell me a little bit from your point of view about your music program, you know, what's on offer, and also how long you've worked at your school?

AM: Okay, so I taught math in [Lakeside] for a long time from 1998 to like 2014, mostly - I had a few leaves of absence in there when my girls were little. And then I worked as an instructional coach in the math department. And then I worked as an assistant principal for several years and this is my third year as principal. Our music program - so obviously, you know, you know a lot about it - but there's, you know, hundreds of kids engaged in both like the larger performance groups, chorus, band, orchestra, and jazz band. And then we're also trying to offer some elective music offerings to students who maybe wouldn't be like your - wouldn't sign up for an orchestra, full orchestra or chorus or band class. So digital music or piano or theater or some theater related electives, and we're trying to align and encourage students through the Performing Arts Academy also. So there's been some course creation that isn't necessarily music but connected to it. For example, we have [Sam], who's the musical music director for the musical, he's a chemistry, a science teacher, who wrote a draft of a course proposal on, like, musical theater for next year. And so provided we have the numbers, you know, Michael would be a science teacher teaching four science classes and, you know, a musical theater elective. So we're trying to stay open-minded to those types of opportunities also.

JG: Okay, very interesting. Um, could you speak a little bit about the Performing Arts Academy? What is that?

AM: Yeah, sure. So We have, you know, five broad themed academies that we ask students to choose when they're entering 10th grade: performing arts, medical careers, STEM, Global Studies and education/public service. We're not interested in kind of asking students to choose a career track, but we are interested in exposing them to connections within a community, making connections between the high school curriculum and the community whenever we can. And certainly asking, you know, I always say if a student chooses medical careers, and they've said for five years of their life, they're gonna be a nurse, or they're going to be a doctor and, and one year in or two years in, they say, "well, this wasn't for me." I say, great. You know, our goal is for you to have a deeper understanding of yourself, your strengths and your interests. And in high school, you get to make those decisions for free. You haven't pay tuition to learn that you thought you wanted to be a nurse and you really can't stand it. So it's really about exposure and helping kids to have a deeper understanding of themselves and their strengths. So Performing Arts Academy is actually probably the least career-focused Academy I would say. So we have some kids who are very interested in trying to take performing arts to, you know, a professional level, whether it be through teaching or performing or tech or stage. But we have a lot of kids for whom that's how they express themselves. And we're trying to make a strong, a small community within a really large public high school where kids are connected to adults and see and have experiences that help them to kind of plan for the future. So that's the idea behind Performing Arts. They've hovered around 200 students in the Performing Arts Academy, maybe a little less than that right now.

JG: Okay, and who teaches within the Performing Arts Academy? Is it a collaboration between different departments?

AM: It really is actually. So it's, um, well, first of all, there's a set of mentors who mentor students on mentor Monday, and they might have, you know, maybe not a really strong connection to performing arts but you know, I'm picturing somebody who's connected to - and when I say it's performing arts it's performing arts and communications in our school, I should have said that originally - so we have students, which is interesting because, you know, in society those, those worlds have kind of blended a little like the news and the entertainment. So I think five years ago, it might have been more, two more distinct fields. But nowadays, it doesn't feel like that at all. You know, when you look at like what Trevor Noah is doing right now, the entertainment component of news. So we have people who work with the broadcast students. We have a creative Creative Writing teacher, we have someone who teaches fashion design, who's a mentor to performing arts students. So we have a set of mentors and that's probably what I would describe as like the baseline level involvement in a Performing Arts Academy. You mentor 10 students every Monday you help them choose where to spend their intervention and enrichment time that week, and you share the message of the academy if there's upcoming field trips, opportunities, speakers, events, that kind of thing. Then there's kind of like another tier of teachers who probably teach courses connected to performing arts and communication, so broadcast, music courses, theater courses, the dance course, the hair and makeup for the stage course, next year the musical theater course. So there's that group of teachers whose actual content areas are kinda - or courses, course schedule is aligned to performing arts and communications. And then there's kind of a cohort of teacher-leaders who are really trying to, like grow the vision of what this means. So I would kind of - I kind of picture staff involvement in three levels.

JG: Okay, very interesting. So, looking specifically at the, the music department and the music classes. You have a lot going on, like you said, you know, hundreds of students participating across all these different classes. What do you think are the broad factors that drive the success of your music program?

AM: Hm. Well, I think there's been a commitment to it. And, you know, we're fortunate to have staff and course sections that let us do that. Sometimes when I look at a neighboring district who has a super strong band program, for example, because they're - I'm not sure if you know that our band's numbers have come down a little. So when I look at, you know, a district, kind of like us, same DRG, that has a really thriving band program, I briefly wonder like, "oh, how come ours doesn't have the numbers like that?" - until you see the numbers and chorus and orchestra. And you know, that high school might not have a thriving string program or any string program. So that's kind of a trade off in [Lakeside] right now, is by offering all of that I think we've seen, you know, you see, maybe the band participation come down a little bit, you might have some kids choosing to sing who maybe played saxophone for a couple years in elementary school, and if they lived in a different town would still be involved in the band. So commitment, you know, the commitment to the staff and the equipment. Um, I would say support by the community. You know, there's certainly interest by parents in kind of having their kids have music be not really like an add on, but like part of the day, part of your, your program. And then I would say, kind of

a culture down there. So once kids are embedded in the music program, there's, there's this like music wing thing. You know, like, my goal is always the kids find a way to connect in our building. And I don't really care if that's the fencing club. I don't know if you've ever seen the fencers on Friday afternoon, like kind of a quirky crowd of students who literally fence in the hallway of the freshman center. I don't really care if it's fencing or football or cross country or volunteer work. Or, you know, oh, I hang out in the music wing, and I view those as positive things you know, just where the adults you're connected to, where's the space that you can kind of be authentically be yourself and try new things. And you probably got a sense of that in [Lakeside] a little bit. There's kids for whom the music wing is their space and their connection. So you know, the financial commitment, the support from the community, the value, and then the culture that that, you know, department has kind of cultivated - if anything, that's been a challenge with the Performing Arts Academy because I think if you were to ask the music teachers - and this is between you and me, maybe - I don't know that they saw the need for that they felt like they already had that small community. But we're trying to kind of align it with the building's vision of how we make sure kids are connected to our school. So that's maybe - those are the three things I would say are kind of the reason for where we are. And leadership, you know, I think [Richard's] been there a long time and [Will] has been there a long time, I think there's a lot to be said for that. You know, when you have people whose goal is to build a program and make it embedded in the community versus - and are proud of it really believe it can excel no matter what the DRG is, versus you know, people who might be very good music teachers, but don't, you know, they don't see their goal as like building a program. But [Richard's] been there since I was a student there, and it's been a really long time too. And they've definitely been committed to building a program. So leadership.

JG: Okay. Okay, awesome. So thinking about outcomes after you know, the four years that students are at [Lakeside], what are the priorities and goals? What do they come away with from their musical experience? What's your goal as far as that goes?

AM: Oh, that's a really interesting question. I mean, I think it really varies. You know, we have kids who will graduate and, and absolutely see music as part of their professional life. We have students who appreciate music as like, their creative space or their therapeutic space or their hobby. And might end up like, as you know, computer engineers but gigging in a band on weekends. So certainly like a value for how music can enrich your lives can kind of - I think a lot of music students get that there is this - like I'm trying to, you probably could phrase this better than me because I was a math teacher - but that music helps you to like connect with humanity and build community and understand emotion and like the condition of humans. So I think, you know, I see music students come out of the music wing and say to me, oh, [Mrs. Morrison], this new piece we're singing, oh, it's gonna make you cry, you know, and I always think, "great, I don't care if you become a coder, you know, you felt this thing. You were part of a community." But the second part of that, the community piece, the collaboration, those are skills they can take with them wherever they go, you know, so I, in similar ways to kind of what athletes learn from teams - I think our kids are learning that everyday down there. So the value of music and how it enriches lives. The importance of finding a way to be part of a community and how to contribute to a community. Those would be some of the things I hope kids take away even if they never do any music professionally.

JG: Interesting, that point about being part of a team and contributing that's - that's really, really similar to something that [Mr. Jones] brought up. So that's interesting. So, a lot of teachers have spoken to the role of administration as I've been going through this project. What do you think of as the role of administration maintaining a strong music program?

AM: I think advocating um, you know, sometimes what happens in the music program might not be super visible to everyone. So if you're a community leader, and you are at the, you know, huge track Invitational every spring or you're at every home football game - I mean football game, actually you do see the band - I think it's important to make sure all stakeholders kind of understand the value that music is bringing to kids' educational experiences, that we don't in [Lakeside] see it as an add on. So one of my jobs is to advocate and to continue to kind of message that this isn't like extra, that this is, you know, an integral part of kids' programs should they choose for it to be. And so sometimes you kind of have to play the role of - like the intermediary between a music department and the central office, whether that be through the budget process or the scheduling process. You have to advocate. I mean, certainly the cheerleader, you know, I think and probably like as the learner - I've learned a lot about what music means to students in our school. You know that I'm personally connected to this too. So, if you'd asked me this question four years ago, I would have answered it very differently. But I've been able to see students kind of really grow and thrive through the music program in our school. And so I'm in a unique position to kind of continue advocating for the financial and structural things that that [Richard] and [Will] and the team need to keep the program growing.

JG: Okay, okay. So thinking a little bit more broadly about, you know, working in [Lakeside] high school - What strategies or practices do you find to be particularly effective working with the students that are in your school? What philosophies do you keep in mind on a daily basis that help you operate at your best with your population? It's a big question.

AM: Yeah. I mean, to give students space to kind of be authentically who they are. So meet them, you know, meet them where they are. And that means that it's our job to understand the worlds they are living in outside of school - their strengths from those worlds, it's really easy sometimes to look at, you know, poor kids or kids where English isn't spoken in the home and only see barriers. And I think if we're doing that we're really missing the big picture. You know, all of our students have a lot of other strengths that they're bringing to the table every day. And we need to help kids identify them in themselves, build confidence around those strengths, and use them to transition into a post secondary plan they're excited about. So that is certainly one piece. You know, relationships, like - even when I'm kind of in contact with a student who's really having a hard day, struggling, whether it's behaviorally or - they might not know me, but I always start by saying, like, "Who's your person?" So I really believe that [Lakeside] high school's job is to help kids make sure they have several of those people who know them well, who advocate for them and that they can go to when something's not right. So building off the strengths of kids. I think more than celebrating the diversity it's our job to kind of bring down any systemic barriers that are in place for students, specifically kids who are traditionally underrepresented, you know, whether it be at the college level, whether it be kids of color. So bringing down barriers, giving kids space to authentically kind of be who they are and develop their strengths. Knowing the whole kiddo, you know, taking their whole story into account and using that to give them what they need, rather than giving every kid the same thing. Yeah, those

are probably some of the big - and individual relationships. Those are probably some of the biggest guiding principles, making sure kids get what they need.

JG: Awesome. Okay, so someone comes into [Lakeside] from from outside the district or that's just outside the school. What do you understand about working with your students and working in your school that someone from the outside might not understand? If anything comes to mind?

AM: Someone when you say someone like someone who who's coming from a district that isn't like as diverse as ours, or?

JG: Sure, yeah.

AM: Um, yeah, I mean, I probably repeat the strength space part. Um, I think if the model that you're viewing kids is that you need to, like, fix them, or give them something so that they can be like everybody else, you're kind of missing it with our student population. Our student population brings a lot of different unique strengths to the table. And I - a lot of time kids don't even know it themselves. So it's our job to kind of A) get them to be able to identify that and articulate that, and then to use it, you know, as they plan their lives. So that might be the piece you know, I think there could be a perception that like, okay, now we have to fix kids or give them the skills that they need. That it is all about gaps or like a deficit model. That might be maybe one of the bigger misconceptions coming in is that this is - the kind of deficit model thinking,

JG: Okay, okay, good. So think about your time, as you know, in the administration as an assistant principal and the principal, how is your music program change? And how is it changing now?

AM: Hm, good question. Um, I wouldn't say it's changed in this way. But I think there is like this unfinished, like whether tension or confusion around the connection to the Performing Arts Academy. So I would call that more of an issue. I would think, I think band enrollment, you know, has changed and is an issue. You know, we've seen a dip in band enrollment, you know, and [Richard] and I have talked each of the last couple years in terms of ways to try and help that. I mean, representation is no doubt an issue, you know, so - I don't know. And not in every element of the music program. But there are places right now where there are not enough, you know, not a proportionate amount of students of color. I don't know - I would be curious, maybe when we're done with the formal part of the interview to see how that struck you as like someone coming into the building, you know, did you walk into a band classroom and think "hm, there aren't that many, like faces of color in here?" Um, I think - so I'm kind of answering issues versus how they've changed, which might be part of why there is an issue. So like, if they haven't changed very dramatically, and maybe - So whether that be repertoire or representation or like a really Western focus in terms of like, what types of music we're exposing kids to, and if we continue to do all of those things, representation isn't going to kind of grow in the way we want it to. And High School is also part of a, you know, a K-12 or 4-12 instrumental program so I think it's important for us to think about how could you - How could you help some of those challenges in younger grades too. So I don't - maybe I'm saying I don't know that I've seen a ton of change as much as you know some things we should be probably changing on if we're going

to keep the program growing. You know, we have another like subset of kids and again you I'd be curious to chat with you about this after - who probably have like a strong church based music background or gospel music background or you know, are we fully tapping that crowd of singers? Yeah, those are some of my thoughts. I don't - I think I skirted your question a little bit.

JG: No, not at all. It's a great answer, because it gets that because it gets at, you know, one of the major issues in music education today. So yeah, looking at your school, does anything come to mind in terms of obstacles that might prevent students from participating in the music program? Whether it's, you know, I don't want to prompt too much, but like scheduling or finances or anything like that?

AM: Yeah, I mean, funding so, you know, instruments, private lessons, you know, I think if you were to put us up next to, um, you know, like, an elite jazz band program, you know, in the state, I'm sure there are kids going to music camps, whether that's funded by their families or in other ways, and brand new instruments, private lessons. Sure, a lot of that is out of reach for many of our - you know, we're well over 60% on free and reduced lunch. So, how we continue to kind of support development, you know, when there are financial issues as an issue. Maintaining a music program is expensive, and [Lakeside] has to make decisions. So I know [Richard] wishes he could probably spend another \$20,000 on brand new instruments every year. So that's one barrier that comes to mind. Can you repeat the question, Jonah?

JG: Yeah, just what are some of the obstacles that might prevent students from participating in music at [Lakeside]

AM: Yeah, I mean, I can imagine that there is - we know there are obstacles just in terms of after school participation. So we have a lot of teenagers who go to work, who take care of siblings, you know, in music, you know, that music wing. So our strength is also - that culture is also kind of built after school, kids hanging in the wing for the musical or for [chamber singers] practice or for sectionals. So if you're unable to do those things, how do we kind of give you that opportunity? That's tricky. I think there's probably barriers at the elementary and middle school levels that are impacting us, whether that's access to instruments, access to kind of like instructional support in terms of instruments. You know, I imagine there are communities where kids are kind of taking private lessons on our instruments from young ages. So I think that might be one of the biggest areas for growth for me, and I've never - I've not really dove into the elementary and middle school participation data and I've not disaggregated it by race. But I have a lot of questions about that. Because as you know, it's it's also hard for a kid to like, pick up their saxophone for the first time in ninth grade.

So I'm kind of - maybe a lack of like a really strong [grades] 4-6 or 4-7 program that brings those barriers away - "here, here you go is an instrument, here is a summer program, here is some additional instruction." So those probably impact us too.

JG: Okay, very interesting. So last question, it's a kind of another broad scope one. So what do you see your role as - we've hinted at this a little bit, again - but what do you see your role as in continuing to sustain and grow and change [Lakeside's] music program?

AM: Hm...Advocacy, kind of having the backs of the leadership and teachers out there, making sure that the quality - that the good work they're doing is visible to people who might not see it. Advocating for students - for all of our students to make sure that the program is representative of them and what they want out of a music program. Like for example, I don't know that, you know - I think I can picture a few singers, girls of color in grades 11 and 12. If I were to sit down and have a really honest conversation about like, "what else would you guys have wanted to sing in chorus?" That's, you know, something we could do better at and I should be doing, you know, the same balance or tension exists in literature, you know, like how much Shakespeare do you read versus like a newer author? So on I think helping from a choral angle to make sure that that we're celebrating, you know, traditional Western choral, you know, kind of, standards, as well as other composers that represent our kids too. Yeah, and then I think certainly, like, prioritizing, you know, doing everything I can to advocate for the actual money, you know, the schedule, the positions, the extracurriculars. I think that's my job. I think helping those kids to be visible across, you know, their accomplishments to be visible across the building, you know, to make sure that those, those accomplishments aren't just kind of living in that wing, but acknowledged and owned and celebrated by the whole building. Helping kids who maybe haven't seen themselves as musicians to find some kind of like entryway into that world.

JG: Okay, well fantastic. That is all I have. In terms of the formal interview, so thank you very much for your participation in the study. That was really, really helpful.

AM: Yeah, of course!

Will Jones, Choir Teacher, Lakeside High School

JG: Let's get started.

WJ: Sure.

JG: I've got some questions about your music program and how you've sustained its success. So first off, obviously because I've been here I know a lot of this, but for the record, just tell me a little bit about your music program. Tell me what you teach.

WJ: Okay. Well, this is my 31st year at [Lakeside High School], and I teach two in-school sections of chorus, and then a section of theater arts, a section of piano 2 and a section of digital music. I also teach piano 1 and honors level and AP music theory every other year. So next year will be a music theory year. That's during the day. After school I have a select choir called the [Chamber Singers], I have a jazz choir, and I have a handbell choir. And up till last year, I was the director of the fall and spring plays and as of three years ago, I was the director of the high school musical for 27 years or something like that. Crazy.

JG: Okay, thank you. So you seem to have a lot going on, very thriving music program. So what do you think are the main factors that drive that success?

WJ: That's a good question. I think any program can have the numbers if...if they just get even the tiniest bit of support from administration, but I think to have a program that has, I think, a consistent quality, which I think [Lakeside High School] has, means that you have to have a plan in place for how you want students to develop over their four years because your program kind of rises and falls with the kids that come back every year. And I think a lot of programs run aground of that, because they don't differentiate for the older students. It's teach to the young students. And then you teach again to the young students. And now by the third time you've done it, you've got people that have been there three times. And if they don't get challenged themselves, they tend to take kind of a mental vacation. And I think that's where you get a lot of this complacency of the older students end up kind of eating the younger students. It's like big fish, little fish. But if you keep the oldest students challenged, I think you keep them more in the process. And the younger students see the oldest students working in the process, and that kind of motivates them to keep going. I think a part, just a sort of our knee jerk reaction to that is - what happens is that from lack of challenging the older students what the director sometimes do, is they give the kids too much artistic control. And then all of a sudden you have the senior who thinks they're in charge...which I think you want to avoid. It's really good to have kids in leadership positions. Don't get me wrong. I have lots of students in leadership positions, but that leadership position comes with responsibilities and academic challenges of its own.

JG: Okay, good. So you mentioned administrative support being a factor in keeping your numbers where they are, what does that look like?

WJ: Um, well, honestly, I think ours could be better. But I've seen some examples of some really good ones where, for example, um, the guidance counselors and the administrators understand that, that maybe you need to not build your entire school schedule around lunch. And that often

happens, is a lot of school schedules get built over 'how can we feed all of them? And I've seen them. I've seen some models where they actually go, what are our singleton classes, and they look at all the singleton classes all the way through the, all the way through the school day. And they go, let's see how many of these we can spread out so that we're not taking our highest flyers and putting them in direct conflict with everything else. So if AP Calculus, for example, is opposite your band class, you've just lost, you know, maybe you have a trumpet player and a saxophone player who their senior year they can't do it because they're in AP calculus. Well, you can't sit there and just go 'well, you shouldn't take AP calculus.' But something like that, that problem could be avoided just by looking at the schedule.

JG: Right.

WJ: So that's, that's kind of, I think that's actually a little bit better than minimal help. But minimal help probably comes in the form of not having to fight with guidance on a daily basis to put kids in and keep them in, especially if they've done it over and over and over again. I've actually seen some systems where, you know, it's not unheard of where a guidance counselor goes, you've been an orchestra for three years, why don't you try something else? Because there's some skill development there. That's why we wanted to keep going.

JG: Okay, good. So what are the priorities and goals of your music program?

WJ: One of my priorities is that the kids have gotta be able to do this when I'm gone, or when they're gone, or when we're not in the same room. So I think, for me, the biggest thing is to give them the skills so that they can make music for the rest of their lives. And that might seem a little corny, but it doesn't mean that they have to all become composers or conductors or, but, you know, be nice if, if they were able to contribute to their church choir, or they were able to sing in their community choir, or they just, you know, liked plunking around at the guitar or their piano and just keeping music part of their adult lives. Because I think that makes for happier and better adults. I've never met a more boring person in my life than someone who's got absolutely no interest in any of the arts at all, it's like 'you don't do anything?' You know, sing a little, draw a little, dance a little, write a little, but do something that sort of activates that whole thing. So I think that's goal one is can they, can they manage without me, or somebody, or my surrogate, leading them in music, can they find their own way in whatever that happens to be? And then the second thing I'd like to think that I'm instilling sort of lifelong discipline lessons through the teaching of the arts, if you have the self discipline and the control, to practice, to learn new things to take what you have and expand on them - that, that's transcendent, that works everywhere. If you can do that, then you can work in a cubicle reinventing a new widget or you can work on a small team doing something like that. And that sort of self discipline for how I will, how I'm going to develop can then go hand in hand with all of the ensemble things that happen and, and, you know, do your work and play well with others. That's always good, that's always a good thing too.

JG: Yeah, absolutely. So I think we've touched on this a little bit, but just to sum it up, how would you describe the culture of your music program?

WJ: Ah, the culture of it, I think is - I like to think that that my room is the safe space in the, in the building, and that kids can just sort of come in and they can leave all of their baggage at the

door and come in and do this for a little while. And that doesn't mean that we're fun and games - I really don't think we are - but we're doing something worthwhile. And we're all doing it together. And we're all approaching it from different angles.

JG: So when thinking about the particular students that you work with, what strategies or practices do you find to be particularly effective, things that you would come back to with working with specific students from your district?

WJ: okay, one more time with the question. Sorry.

JG: Right. So thinking about the students in your district, the particular people that you work with, what strategies, practices, philosophies do you think are helpful when you think about them in particular?

WJ: Oh, okay. Um, honestly, one of the one of the overriding philosophies is that there's always something else to do and always something else to learn. Um, and I think that becomes very clear to, say, an entering Junior in their third year, when all of a sudden they're being asked to teach. It's like 'okay, now you're going to teach these five freshmen and this one sophomore, go get started.' And it's kind of neat to watch them relearn not only the concepts, but learn how it is that they are going to be a leader. And, and there's so many - I think there's so much out there in high schools where we say, you know, okay, these kids have got to step up and be leaders, but we never give them a chance to actually do that where they can succeed. We'll take a kid that we think has the innate qualities and we'll stuff them up in front of 40 people and hope that they don't burst into flames. As opposed to, let's take a kid who maybe has the content knowledge but doesn't know how to work with people, and let's give them three people and see if he can work in that smaller group. And then kind of build out from there.

JG: Right. Um, so what do you understand after, you know, 31 years about working with students in your school that someone looking from the outside might not get? If anything comes to mind.

WJ: Yeah, um, you know what I think? I think if a stranger saw it I think there would be two big misconceptions. I think the first misconception is probably just a generic school one, and that is, um, when a kid is having a bad day, that it's almost entirely not about you. But when somebody sees it from the outside, they think, why is that kid treating me like this? They're not thinking of why, what's going on in the kid that's causing it. They're thinking, what about me? I think that's, that's one of them and I think that's generic. I think you'd see that in math class. I think you'd see that anywhere. But in music class, I think the big misconception for somebody would be how can something...honestly, so controlled, look so chaotic. I've had people walk in at lesson time. And there are kids doing, there are 30 kids working on 15 tasks at the same time. And it looks like just rush hour in a train station. But they're all getting stuff done. You just have to kind of see past the chaos. Because the idea of creation is never quiet and it's never organized. It has to be kind of messy and it has to be a little loud. And you just have to kind of get used to the idea that that's going to happen. And that's a big transition for someone just walking into a class.

JG: Excellent. So, you've been here for a long time, of course, how has your teaching changed since you started working at your school?

WJ: Ah, well, I'm not taking three hours on something that I can do in five minutes. I had an enormous amount of energy in my youth, and I wasted it. Just at the drop of a hat, I'd throw myself into a four hour project that now I would look at and go, 'if I think about this for two minutes, I can probably get this down to about 10 minutes worth of work.' I've just gotten kind of better at that. And the, the toolbox - I talk to this not only with students, but with student teachers, the idea of the toolbox - is that I just have a lot of tools now. And then It just comes from, you know, kind of being around the block. I can't say that things don't surprise me, I hope. Here I am sitting in the sanctum sanctorum because I can't get into school. So things can surprise me. But I think I've just gotten, just gotten used to the idea that these problems are surmountable, as long as you just spend a little time thinking about it, as opposed to just frantically throwing yourself at it. And I just, I wouldn't be able to hold up the schedule that I used to keep when I was in my late 20s. I mean, I'd be at school for 14 hours a day, every day.

JG: Alright! Is there anything in your perspective towards your students that's changed in, over the time?

WJ: Um, I think that this generation of students has a unique, almost perfect storm disadvantage that they all have to overcome. And I think that perfect storm is, is the ever presence of social media and the, um, sort of omnipresent cell phone - which has a lot of information, but it's also rather anonymous. And so what you have is students who are, at one side of it, they're extremely critical of other people's stuff. Because that's what they've been taught through social media, it's okay to 'Thumbs up, thumbs down, I hate this, whatever' - kind of from the protection of anonymity. And at the same time, because of this, we have, we're growing a generation of students who are kind of isolated. And when you're isolated, it gives you a thin skin. You don't respond to even constructive criticism quite as well. And nobody likes to be criticized, I don't like to be criticized. But so we have this kind of perfect storm, we have a very critical digital society and we're creating people who don't respond well to criticism. Um, I think maybe one of the takeaways of all of this nonsense that we're going through right now is that maybe we'll actually pull that back by half a generation because we're seeing the social media used, and the digital media used for really positive things. And we're seeing the kids going, 'wow, I really missed the day to day interactions that I'm having, in real time in real life.' And I think maybe that'll give everybody a little bit nicer perspective of when we get out of all of this, that you want to actually make those contacts, which with human beings, and maybe put all of this digital hardware aside a little bit more. That would be nice.

JG: Mm hmm. Absolutely.

WJ: I mean, I'm doing a lot of digital teaching right now. I can't wait to not do that. It'll be nice to get back in a classroom.

JG: Yeah, one day, right?

WJ: Yeah. Probably not till the fall. Yeah.

JG: So looking at your program today. Is there anything you'd change about the content, what you teach the course offerings, anything along those lines?

WJ: Ah, I often thought that if I could get, one of the most fun things that I do is my handbell choir. I often thought if I could get that in as a, as a daily elective that a group like that would just be, they'd be something else. So just little things like that. I'm really kind of pleased with, with how especially the ensembles are taught because the kids get a lot of everything. And we don't just focus on 'what are we singing on the next concert?' So I think that's, I think that's good. I definitely keep that one rolling around. Um, and I honestly wish we'd started the piano stuff a heck of a lot earlier. The piano classes as they exist now are only about five or six years old. Yeah, we actually taught digital music before we started teaching piano and I think that was probably misguided but that was what we had. By the time we got the money - we weren't going to get the money for a piano studio, we did get the money for a digital audio workstation studio, and so kind of branched out from there. But boy would that have been great. If I could have started teaching piano to these kids 15, 20 years ago, that would have been awesome. Right?

JG: So looking at your students, your school, what do you think are some of the potential obstacles for students participating in music? And what are the challenges in sustaining the strong music program that you have?

WJ: Um, I think there's a lot of, there's always been different avenues. There's always been sort of, 'oh, the kid would rather play soccer or would rather be in one of the art clubs or would rather be in student government.' And there's always been pulls on the kids that way. And we've kind of figured out over the years how to let a kid do as much as they possibly can. But there's a bigger pull and that's the pull to basically do nothing. And I think a lot of the kids opt for that, because they see school as a whole, as sort of an obstacle as opposed to an opportunity. And when that happens, you have kids that are waiting on the two o'clock bell, as opposed to, I'm gonna be here till 3:30, quarter to four, but that's where my opportunities are. And I think that's a big, that's a big obstacle not just for our school, but for every school is that you have to sort of fight the, the urge to flee the building when it comes to some of the kids. And like I said, your high fliers, they're gonna stick around, they kind of get it. But there are so many kids in the middle I think could be helped immeasurably by just doing one thing after school no matter what it was, just to give them the sense that school is not an obstacle.

JG: Awesome. So, last question. So you personally, what do you think - What do you see your role as in continuing to sustain this program to serve all your students?

WJ: Um, honestly, that's, that's changed over the years. Right now, what I'm trying to do is get, get the structures involved, so that if somebody were to come in and take my place, that they would be able to sustain a good program. Because what I don't want them to do is think that they can't do stuff on their own, but also you'd hate for somebody to come in and just go, 'Okay, there it is, just go do it any way you see fit.' What I want to do is, I want to put some things together so that a person can come in and they can look at the body of the years worth of work and go, 'yeah, I want to do that. I think I want to do that. There's no way I want to do that.' Because then

at least they've made some long term decisions about how the program will continue. Because, you know, I don't know how many more years I have before I retire, but I'd like to think that the program will last much longer than my presence in the building. So I'm kind of looking at it that way. When I was kind of in the middle of all of this career-wise, I was always kind of balancing. 'How do I make the program better, give the kids more opportunities, and at the same time hold on to my sanity?' And when I was brand new, it was 'how can I build this program?' And I never even thought about my sanity. So that's kind of the transition that went on there. The first 10 years, sanity had nothing to do with it.

JG: Okay, well, any other final thoughts on this whole topic? Your program, anything?

WJ : No, I think I think you've covered it pretty well. Those are really good questions.

JG: Okay. Well, awesome. Thank you so much!

Beth Pawlak, Orchestra Teacher, Lakeside High School

JG: All right. So first of all, tell me a little bit about your music program from your point of view. What do you teach and how long have you worked at your school?

BP: All right, I'm just finishing my fifth year at [Lakeside] high school and my 30th year teaching - What a way to go out for this milestone. Um, and I teach generally five orchestra classes. My very first year I had four orchestra classes and a piano class. Um, but since then the numbers have gone up and I do teach five orchestra classes. Two freshmen classes, which are pretty small by design, one sophomore class, and two classes of junior and senior mix. And they meet you know, three out of the four day rotation for about 50 minutes or so - 52 minutes. Um, and that's my basic schedule.

JG: All right. Good. So, there's a lot going on at [Lakeside], of course, I got to see - what do you think are some of the main factors that drive the participation, the success of your music program?

BP: I think one thing speaking specifically for strings first, it's that the 4-12 string/orchestra teachers work really well together. And we just try to cultivate this community of orchestra members and people. I know there's a lot of - there tries to be a lot of tutoring going on between middle school and high school. I try to get down to [elementary school] and to [middle school] a couple of times a year specifically to work with the cello players. Um, I know a lot of siblings, do join the orchestra program, it's kind of like a family thing. I think that's part of the reason for the success of the string orchestra program. I think at the high school, we are very fortunate to have five full time music teachers. And I think that shows a significant commitment from the district which is - which is historical. I think for a long time, [Lakeside] has had a big music program anyway - big, active lots of participation. I think the culture of the community supports it. [Lakeside] has a symphony. [Lakeside] has [a community barbershop chorus], there's a [Lakeside] community chorale. I don't know that there's a [Lakeside] town band. But there are a lot of just you know, at home bands of all sorts. There's a bagpipe troupe, brigade, group, whatever you want to call it. There's [a local music store], there's a lot of music teachers from other districts that live in town. And I think [Lakeside] has had just this history of being very active culturally in the arts, and I think that contributes to the participation in the schools. I think it's just a reflection of the community. And that's one of the things I really love about [Lakeside]. I think also with the high school in addition to being very fortunate that we have five full time teachers that there really is something for everybody - where there's the high level [Chamber singers], jazz band, Chamber Orchestra, with you know, cello ensemble and string quartets on their own. Between, all the way from the large ensembles to the marching band to the handbell choir to the guitar and piano and digital music electives, there really truly is something for everybody. And, and for those kids who are in the ensembles, that make our wing, their home, truly, there are a good number of kids who come down there, you know, their one period a day and really like what they do, but then have other interests elsewhere. And I think all those things really combine just to make to make our program really successful.

JG: Okay, you mentioned how important those teachers going all the way down to fourth grade are - do you have many, or any students joining at the high school level, like are students able to get started that late?

BP: It's really hard on a string instrument to get started that late. I haven't had anybody approach me, really. I've had kids who, you know, are cello who switch to bass or violin switch to Viola. Um, but it's really hard to start from scratch, more so than I would say in a band program. And I know, I know, our band teachers have had kids that have come in and not played before but have joined. Again, I haven't had any requests, and my personal opinion is that it's a much harder thing. Right, when you're talking about a string instrument.

JG: So thinking about your students over their four years. What are your priorities and goals in terms of what they come away with?

BP: Um, I would say the first thing that I want them to come away with is a sense of pride in what they've done. And a sense of, they like how they sound when they play. You know, that they enjoy what they're doing, they like what they're doing, they're proud to have been part of the ensemble and really understand the importance of that everybody is in this together and it's a collective endeavor. You know, that having been said, you know, there's a ton of sort of technical and extra-musical things that I want them to come away with, and I could run down the whole list of you know, vibrato and shifting and advanced technique and all that stuff and you know, thumb position for cello players. But you know, I want them to have felt that they've contributed, they like how they sound, they like what they hear when it all comes together and have, you know, have a sense of what orchestral music sounds like when it's all put together and they can look at a symphony orchestra performance and kind of unpack it, take it apart a little bit and be able to understand what's going on.

JG: Okay, good. How would you describe the culture of your music program, both your classroom and more broadly, across the school?

BP: Um, the custodians say they love working in our wing, because it's the most sane place in the whole school. Um, yeah, I mean, our kids, they take a lot of pride in what goes on down in our little isolated wing. They look out for one another. You've seen the crowd outside the orchestra room door every morning you know, some kids get there at 7, some kids get there before but there is a crowd of probably sometimes close to 30 kids between 7 and 7:30 in the morning just you know sitting there eating their breakfast, catching up on their homework, just talking - and it's just such a place where they come to feel comfortable, to feel welcome, to feel like they have a place to belong, to feel like if they don't have any other place to go that that's a safe spot, a safe place. Same thing in the band room. Um, you know, and we have a lot of sort of traditional high school music groupies, and I think they just, they just feel like it's their place to be and they do look out for one another. They take care of their space, they take care of the equipment, they take care of the stage, they just look out for one another. And even you know, the students who you would think maybe are not so engaged in what's going on - they're there for four years. So something is pulling them back every year rather than them dropping. We don't have a high dropout rate really at all. You know, once they get there, we kind of have them hooked. And again, the kids you would think that maybe even aren't so engaged are getting

something out of it day to day in the class that keeps them there for four years. So it's all good. And then they know that we care about them. You know, they know that we are five teachers and whatever, um, clinical people or student teachers we happen to have along, they know that we all care about them. And we'll do our best to help them along, musically or extra-musically.

JG: Excellent, excellent. How important is your relationship with your administration in your school?

BP: Yeah it's really important. We feel that they trust us to be the experts in our classroom and I don't feel that admin is looking over our shoulders, you know, regardless of how much you know if it's a week and a half into the quarter and you've just finished grades that they're saying "you've got to get some grades in" and regardless of that aside, you know, they understand that we are not math or science and some of the things that might hold true as far as assignment variation and grading and all that stuff for those classes sometimes don't really apply to us. So you know, they understand that we are a different animal, they trust us to be the experts in our classroom. And by and large we feel we can go to admin with, you know, an issue, a problem, a solution, a project and we'll be listened to, you know, if nothing else. Um, so I think we feel like we have a very good relationship with our administration. And it's really important and they recognize the numbers of kids that are involved down in our area and what we contribute to the school. So it's good.

JG: Okay, good, good. So thinking about the particular students that you work with, over your years at [Lakeside], have you found any strategies or practices or attitudes that you keep in mind on a daily basis when working with your kids?

BP: Yes. it's really hard to draw a balance or to find the balance between being serious enough for the real high fliers and relaxed or down to earth or not as intense for the kids who are there for maybe different reasons. Because unlike other schools, my chamber orchestra is an evening activity. And the 31 students in the chamber orchestra are also enrolled in the regular classroom orchestras. In a lot of schools, chamber orchestra is a separate class that's just by themselves, and then the regular orchestra is non-Chamber Orchestra kids. So it's hard to find that balance and it's something I just have to sort of constantly remind myself of, is that I have to be balanced between being really intense that I know that those kids want, and maybe not quite so intense to not lose some of the other kids. You know, and that doesn't mean high expectations. It just means sort of intensity of delivery, if that makes sense.

JG: Good, okay. Is there any anything in particular about [Lakeside] students that, you know, either when you came in and first started teaching there that was, you know, different or new or unique about this school?

BP: Well, I spent 25 years teaching middle school, okay. In [CT town], a wealthy little shoreline community. And that was my first job. And I stayed there for 25 years. And it was - truly I enjoy every second of it. So it was a big difference, 1, coming to high school from middle school, and 2, coming to a place as big as [Lakeside] as diverse as [Lakeside] from a much, much smaller community, that was a totally different kind of community. So there are a lot of different things about coming to [Lakeside] and I think honestly, the biggest thing was that it was high school.

And I spent the, really the first year just figuring out how to really give them that independence that a lot of them were capable of, and not feeling that I had to be so, you know, so hands on like you need to do with middle school kids. So yeah, and you know, also, I think in [CT town] as well, a lot of kids own their own instruments, a lot of kids studied privately just because of the demographics of that particular town. And there was a ton of parental involvement, right. And while there's a good bit of parental involvement in [Lakeside], it's not, I don't hear from them as often as I would have in [CT town]. And a lot of the kids don't own their own instruments. So I made it a point my first couple of years to really start purchasing better instruments, because you have a beginning student instrument, compared to even an intermediate or beginning you know, advancing instrument, you could be playing the same thing and the tone quality makes the difference in the better instrument. And if a high school orchestra is going to sound like a high school orchestra, you need to have good instruments. So 1, trying to make them or trying to make them feel like high school players and learning how to give them that independence and have them be self directed and 2, just bettering the inventory of instruments so that we could be proud of the sound that we were producing.

JG: Okay, good. Have you found that your teaching practice has changed over the last few years, in any other ways?

BP: I've really gotten way better at the technology. And that is not to say that I am a whiz by any means. But, um, but I've just gotten better about you know, sharing things with kids, the musictheory.net you know, the Google Classroom. Um, I think as far as string pedagogy - Really, that hasn't changed. Just because I know what good string teaching looks like. You know, scales and ear training and bowing, articulation, just on a little bit of a higher level than it was from middle school, Right? And I'm still really looking for ways to teach violin vibrato in a better way - I'm a cellist. You know, but that's where I draw upon the kids and my experts. And I think that the high fliers, the Chamber Orchestra, kids, the ones that studied privately really do like taking over and taking control and, and saying, "alright, take these 10 freshmen violins and, and teach them a basic third position scale."

JG: Good. Is there anything that you would change about what courses you're offering, or what you teach? Either specific to you or in the program more broadly?

BP: Honestly, no. I mean, I've thought a little bit about what it would be like to have my chamber orchestra be part of the school day. But I think that would leave out a lot of kids. Because if they were in - they'd have to be in the regular orchestra. I don't know. Um, I like having that separate. I like having the five orchestra classes. I think we offer so much for the kids. I think we're almost as well rounded as we could be, really.

JG: Okay, awesome. So thinking about your school and you know, the whole population of students, what would you say are some of the obstacles that might prevent students from participating in your program?

BP: At the high school level?

JG: Sure, or if anything comes to mind more broadly, as well.

BP: Right...I think in the younger grades, I mean, you could say, well, you know, lack of an instrument in the younger grades, but we'll provide an instrument for anybody that wants one. I think in the elementary school, they purchase all the books. I think, honestly I don't think there's anything that's preventing kids from actually participating in our program. I know, sometimes there's obstacles with kids, you know, getting rides to concerts, or staying after school for rehearsals, or things like that, but we work around that I've never even had anybody say "I don't have concert clothes." And and if someone did come to us with some kind of obstacle, some kind of prevention of, you know, being able to participate, we would just find a way around it. I think in general to get an instrument in a kid's hands and a method book in a kid's hands and to get it worked into their schedule, you know that there isn't anything that's keeping them or obstacles for them to participate. And I would say that really goes all the way down to grade 4. We do everything we can to get an instrument in the kids hands and then into the program.

JG: Okay, very good. Are there any challenges, you know, moving forward thinking about what you want to do with the program, any challenges that you foresee to maintaining and growing your music program?

BP: Well, this current situation is obviously a challenge. And if I'm feeling like it's a challenge, I can't even imagine what the academic teachers are feeling and what they're going to have to deal with when they come back - Whenever they come back. I would say it would just be in encouraging kids at the lower grades who may feel that well, you know, "I've lost this whole one and a half marking periods, we haven't done all that much playing, why should I even bother to sign up next year?" So that would be a challenge to encourage kids that you are not behind, you know, you might be a little bit rusty, but you know, everybody is a little bit behind and a little bit rusty and we will take you absolutely where they are, you know where you are, please sign up, please continue. Um, you know, when we want you in our, we want you in our programs. I think, speaking to [middle school], the seventh and eighth grade school, I think the fact that that eighth grade music over the past couple years has become an option, not a requirement has hurt us just a little bit. And I think, I think kids need to be encouraged as much as they can from the top down, that if they're in an instrumental ensemble, and they've managed to stick it out through fifth and sixth grade where they learn quite a lot, they get to seventh grades, just stick with it. And you know, stick with it till after your freshman year in high school, then if you decide it really isn't for you, then great, you've experienced every level of an instrumental ensemble. And, you know, by the time you're done with your freshman year, if you figure out that it's not for you, then you know, certainly move on to something else. But I would feel that the obstacle, the challenges is between levels, when kids are switching schools. And we try to do as much as we can with letting the eighth graders know, you know, what's available and going down there and talking to them. I think that eighth grade as an option is an issue and I think that the schedule selection between [elementary school] and [middle school], Between [middle school] and the high school is done without a lot of parental involvement. I would like to see, you know, a parent signature, "This is what my kid wants to take."

JG: Okay, interesting, interesting. Okay. Yeah, anything -

BP: I'm sorry, one more thought - even if you're talking about, you know, in the high school with kids getting things scheduled. I've had sophomores in freshmen orchestra. I've had sophomores in junior/senior orchestra. I've even had a couple of seniors in the freshman orchestra period. And you know, it works. We just, it's partially an independent study thing. It's partly a peer tutoring thing. You know, and we just make it work and kids that want to do it find a way to make it work.

JG: Right. Okay. Okay. So, last question, just kind of anything else that you - any other thoughts that you have as to your role in continuing to sustain a successful program?

BP: You know, I just want to continually show kids and make kids realize what a special thing it is and a unique thing it is to play in an orchestra. I tell you it is a culturally sophisticated skill that's foreign to a lot of people. You know, everybody knows what a chorus is, you hear the national anthem, or you know, whatever. Everybody knows what a band is, you hear bands all the time. You see brass instruments, in lot of a lot of classic pop groups. Not everybody knows what an orchestra is. It's a cultivated experience. It's a cultivated taste. And as long as - it is a culturally sophisticated skill, and I want kids just to know what a unique skill that it is, and it just sets them apart and makes them part of this really unique world that can open up so many possibilities for them if they want to take it and run with it.

JG: Okay, well, good. Thank you so much! That's all I have.

BP: You're welcome. Happy to spout for a little bit.

JG: Yeah! Absolutely, this is very helpful. Thank you.

John Rossi, Guitar/Songwriting Teacher, Lakeside High School

JG: For starters, Tell me a little bit about your music program. What do you teach? How long have you worked at your school?

JR: I teach guitar mostly, and other electives as well, so I teach piano, I've taught digital music, songwriting, music appreciation and all the other classes besides, like, the ensemble courses. This is my third year at high school, eighth year teaching total.

JG: Okay, cool. All right, so a lot going on in [Lakeside], It's a pretty thriving program. So what do you think are the main factors that drive that success, the large participation, and all that.

JR: I think there's a lot, actually. So I think one thing is the history that the music program has had in the town. My grandmother grew up right across the street, on [high street], so I as a child would come over to her house often and there was always a lot of music stuff going on right across the street at the high school. So I, even from a young age, I remember [Lakeside] having a lot of music going on. But I think the fact that the [Chamber Singers] has been around for 70, 80 years, something like that, it's like steeped in tradition. The fact that [Will] and [Richard] have both been there for 30-plus years and have had so much time to build a program. The fact that [Lakeside] is willing to support the music program and hire like five music teachers for a school, which is insane to me - I've worked in schools where I was the only music teacher, and there weren't any chorus classes, band classes, orchestra, there's nothing - so I think it's a combination of the history of it, the work that some of the teachers that have been there for a long time, and the support that the administration has, for the music program. It's kind of a lot, you need a lot to have a good music program.

JG: Okay, awesome. Awesome. How would you describe the priorities and goals of your music program? What do you want the kids to come away with at the end of their time at [Lakeside]?

JR: Personally, I want students to be able to have a similar experience with music in high school that I did, which not necessarily - I'm not looking for students to leave and go to college for music, but I want some of their best memories to be in music classes. And I think I have a really cool avenue to do that teaching guitar. I've switched it from a kind of more traditional classical guitar program and I've kind of moved away and gotten more towards a non-traditional like modern band type of style, that I think a lot - It's increased some of the popularity of and a lot of kids come in, and they're excited to learn rock music and all sorts of stuff. So I think just being able to have it add to that high school experience that they're going to remember however long into their future.

JG: Good. How would you describe the culture of the music program? We've hinted at this a little bit, but anything else to add?

JR: Um, I guess the culture is just supportive, like being supportive of everybody, being respectful of everybody, and more kind of like social constructivist like - they work together to learn songs, especially in the modern band after school program, I've really kind of developed that where they're student leaders, they will learn multiple parts, they will print out chord charts,

whatever - like the sheets that they need, they'll teach the other students, they're really welcoming when new people come in, and it's kind of its own culture now, and that's really exciting for me. So, I can bring that towards my classroom as well.

JG: Alright, modern band after school - Can you tell me about that? I didn't know about that program.

JR: Yeah, it's on - well was on - Thursdays after school. I started it because a few years ago I went to a Little Kids Rock workshop. I was working in [----] as the choral director - That's my background is choral. And it started because they're like, "Hey, we have this scheduling issue. We have a lot of kids that can't fit into something. Can you offer maybe a second music course?" So I said, "Sure. If you kind of give me some money, I'll buy some guitars, I'll do some stuff." And they did that, they bought a whole classroom set of guitars for me. I did that Little Kids Rock workshop and it was more of a take on informal learning practices and just bringing some of the music and culture from today, more recently. Because historically, the music education programs have been so like - and it's not good or bad. But it's been very the same for so long. And so - I'm sorry, I might have lost the question.

JG: No, not at all. Just, you know, talking about the modern band program.

JR: Okay, yeah, so in the classroom, I thought about offering like bass or drums or keys or something like that. But I think I like that the modern band is an after school program. And so we have a group, sometimes we'll have eight, sometimes we'll have 20 kids be there, with the goal of ultimately performing. And so what we'll do is as a group we'll talk about, and like vote on the next song that we're going to learn the following week, or for the following week, and during the week, it's their responsibility to go learn their parts. I'll go find resources, and I'll post it on Google Classroom. Like we have a Google Classroom for it. And I'll say, "Hey, here's a Guitar Tutorial. Here's the bass, here's the drums. Here's whatever. Who wants to sing?" And I'll have a couple of kids volunteering, you know, I'll sing - And so we'll come in on that Thursday, run through it a few times - try to get like a, like a garage band practice, like a rock band practice. So it's kind of different, but it's awesome at the same time.

JG: Okay, okay - Do you find that that mostly attracts students who are already in another music class, or mostly kids who aren't?

JR: a lot of kids that are not music kids, which is awesome for me. I have some that are, and some of the students that have been involved in music that are there have a little bit more of that experience already. So, some of them are the leaders, but I get a lot of students that are involved in the music program, which is - it wasn't like, necessarily 100% my goal, but I'm seeing that and I'm really glad that it is that way because, you know, as the music program, we want to try to reach everybody.

JG: Right, Awesome. Awesome. Okay. So can you speak a little bit to the role of the administration you mentioned in maintaining a successful program?

JR: I can, and I can share what it looks like and what it doesn't look like. In [Lakeside] I think it's really great. They have really supportive administration for music. I don't want to say, because the principal's daughter is really involved in music. I think, without that, and before that, because before [Alice] was the principal, there was still a lot of support for the music program. And it just goes to things from like allowing, like - what I find to be an issue is when there are administrators that think that music is run, like any other subject or any other like art or any other like, oh, social studies or math, and so they don't understand the needs of music classes. So for ensembles, they don't - the fact that you know, we have a percussion class, like that [Angelo] teaches just percussion is crazy. A lot of towns don't do that, like "No, teach them all at the same time, why can't you do that?" So in [Lakeside] that's become the norm, and it's just what's expected. And in [Lakeside], the administrators will be honest and say, "I don't know that much about music. I'm gonna trust you, the music teachers and the professionals in that area, to let me know what you need, and I just trust you." I've been in places where that isn't the case, and it really hurts the music program because administrators don't understand the needs. They think that they know best overall. And that just is damaging.

JG: Okay, okay - So thinking about the students from your particular district, your particular school, what strategies, practices, you know, attitudes do you find are particularly effective in working with the students that you work with? What do you keep in mind on a daily basis?

JR: Um, well, my wife is a social worker. And so she's done a lot with like psychology and helping and working in places where it's either people in addiction, or they need some sort of service. And one of the things that they go on in like social work and psychology is, don't work harder than the person you're trying to help, which is kind of a thing that I've seen work really well with my students. So I'll go in, you know, from the first day, like welcoming of class and I'll tell them, "Hey, I love my job. I love being here playing guitar and I know that a lot of you are going to love this class. It is going to be a lot of work. However, I'm not going to work harder than you at getting better. Like I'll work as hard as you do. So if you really want to get better, and you're like busting your butt and you want to come after school and you want to come during flex, I'll do that 100% but if you want to sit there, you want to continuously like use your phone or you want to continuously not do your work, I'm fine with that too. And if you want to fail, I don't mind." And so a lot of that takes off a lot of stress I think, on both teacher and student ends, because students that don't want to do the work often will fight back or give you more grief, if you keep getting up in their face about something. But if they know from the start, like this is all on me. And the teacher is not gonna like, you know, ride me on this or constantly - Like I haven't had very many issues at all with behavior. I've had like rowdy classes, you know, classes that are hard to kind of get to "hey, calm down and let's listen," but I haven't really had much issues with like, really bad behavior. And I think, I think part of that is just letting students do it. They're the ones that are responsible for their own learning.

JG: Okay. So somebody comes into your classroom from, you know, either just outside your classroom or outside your school in general, what do you understand about the way you work with the kids, the way you run your classroom that they might not get right away? If anything comes to mind.

JR: Hm, that's an interesting question. I think they might not get that my situation where I'm teaching a particular instrument group, but they're not required to own an instrument. So I can't assign them and expect them to practice at home. So I give a lot of time in class for individual practice. So I think if there was, maybe an administrator or somebody that didn't know about what it takes to learn an instrument. If they walked in, they might just see students sitting around playing their guitar, playing different things, and me just kind of walking around looking around and not being too hands on - not having a specific typical, like oh, mini lesson or workshop, like, how some of the other subjects kind of run their classes might not know why that is

JG: Okay. Good. Um, so looking back over your years at [Lakeside], how has your teaching changed since you started working at your school, either what you teach or your practice or anything along those lines?

JR: So I guess I'll answer both of the what I teach and also my practices - what I teach is probably the easier one to answer first off - I've always taught, I've taught guitar even outside of this district, but I hadn't taught songwriting before, which was really awesome for me to start teaching. So that's one of my favorite classes to teach. I've taught piano before. I didn't teach - This is the first district I've had to teach digital music, which was a learning curve for me. So we were all kind of learning that same time, the first time I ran that. And also guitar ensemble class, that was new for me this year, though. So I'm starting that up again next year, that'll be fun. But in terms of practice, how I've changed mostly is giving the students more independence, in a way - like I come from teaching Middle School, mostly, both of my previous jobs have been at the middle school level. So you need to do a lot more to hold their attention at the middle school level than you do at the high school level. Not to say that you don't need to at high school level, but it's not - it's different. So I've had success being a little bit more hands-off, and giving them that personal responsibility, whereas in middle school, you can say that and do that, but it's just going to be a miserable experience for everybody if you're that hands-off in a middle school. And I think it's more of my style as well. I can never be an elementary school teacher. I just don't have that level of energy to put on that face and that tone of voice. I can't. I've done it, you know, but that's just not me. And so this is more natural for me. So, yeah.

JG: Okay, good. Is there anything you would change now about what you offer in terms of courses or the material that you teach?

JR: what I would love to do is have the materials to allow the students to rent the guitars and make that a requirement. So that way I could expect them to practice at home, I could assign work to take home and do. I would need to kind of restructure it a little bit more like an ensemble class, like a chorus or a band or something, and that might change how the classes actually run day to day, but I want to give students the opportunity to rent a guitar if they would like to. Because now I've tossed around that idea, but we don't have the guitar cases for it so I can't just give them the guitar to take home. Yeah, so that's pretty much it.

JG: Okay, interesting. So in your school, what would you say are some of the obstacles that could prevent or discourage students from participating in the music program?

JR: [Lakeside] specific or just...?

JG: [Lakeside] specific.

JR: I think scheduling is an issue sometimes. That's probably the biggest thing that I've kind of rung my hands out, because I've had so many students come to me with an interest to continue. So I have a lot of students take guitar 1, which is like my - I want to take that pool and push them to guitar 2, and then guitar ensemble. And the biggest pain in the butt for me has been them coming back to me in like February when they do their schedules and say, "Oh, my guidance counselor said it wouldn't fit my schedule." And so then they don't take it. Or it'll be two or three years until they take the next level of guitar, and then they haven't touched a guitar in two or three years and will be doing guitar 2, but you really need to be back in guitar 1 so like...I wish there was more expected continuity with the tension. And I push the guidance - it's gonna be an issue everywhere, and it's been an issue everywhere I've been. Right, like, guidance, they have their job to do. And they don't know everything similar to administrators. But...yeah, I wish they would communicate more and be more understanding like, "Hey, we need - this is our goal for our department."

JG: Yeah, that that comes up fairly consistently across schools and teachers. Absolutely. Is there anything else that you feel is a challenge to you, as a teacher to sustain a music program that lots of kids are able to participate in?

JR: In a way, I think the challenge specific to me is that I'm the only one that isn't teaching an ensemble group that's like, involved in all of the festivals and the field trips and this and that, and I want to build that guitar ensemble to be one of those groups. Um, and so I guess the challenge for me is I've never had to create something like that. So it's new - I'm kind of going with the flow, but I have a lot of support from you know, the other music teachers in the building. And I have a lot of, well, you know, wealth of experience to kind of leech off of, you know, everyone in the building. [Angelo's] been there what, 19 years, the next youngest music teacher there. So I have a lot of experience to kind of pull from, which is great. My first music job - permanent job - was, I was the only one in the building, I had no one to ask, talk about and that was the one with no band, chorus, orchestra, no instruments in the room so I'm like "what the heck do I teach here?" So having experienced teachers to learn from is great.

JG: Okay, awesome. So moving forward, looking, you know, to the future to however many years in the future at [Lakeside] - What do you see your role as in continuing to sustain a successful program?

JR: This has been something that I've thought about a lot of things - so I'm finishing up my Master's this summer, which - I took the long route - The first couple jobs that I had made me kind of question my career choice. So when I found [Lakeside] and it was finally the one I'm like "Okay, yes, finally, this is it. I'm like okay, I will get my masters now." So it took me a while, but I'm getting there. What I would like to do is because of my experience with administration, I want to get my RN2 and work in some sort of administrative role, specifically to support the arts programs and music programs in whatever towns. Because I have seen how terrible it is for other teachers that just kind of have this job that they're just miserable in with no

support and I know how it felt for me personally, and I'd like to make sure that I can help a district that doesn't have that. So I don't know if that will be in [Lakeside] forever. I love working in [Lakeside]. It's been great. But I think my ultimate calling is more towards that administrator role.

JG: Okay. Do you think as an administrator, you'd encourage more, like, modern band area course offerings or advanced guitar class?

JR: Absolutely, I would encourage a lot more of everything. Because, you know, as a music educator, we want to reach the most people that we can. We're only going to reach so much if we have the traditional band course orchestra where if you're in high school and you don't know how to read music or play an instrument, well, you're kind of out of luck, because that's like, "Oh, well, we learn instruments in elementary or middle school." So having alternate non-traditional courses is a way to reach more students. So of course, I'd love to do that.

JG: Okay, awesome. So any final thoughts on your program, your role, anything about [Lakeside]?

JR: Um, no, you know, like I said, I'm just, I'm glad that I work in [Lakeside]. It's a great district to work in where I think we have a lot more support and a lot of benefits that a lot of districts. But yeah, that's pretty much it. So. Yeah.

JG: Okay, awesome. Thank you so much. This has been great. This was enormously helpful.

George Davis, Principal, Southview High School

JG: So first things first, tell me a little bit about your music program from your point of view. What's on offer, and also how long have you worked at your school?

GD: I worked at my school for 26 years. Started as a substitute, now I am the principal somehow. Our music program - I can give you you know, a quarter century, there of the history of our program. Our band was kind of okay in the 80s and, you know, early 90s, went away until Mr. [Miller] and Miss [Thomas] kind of came back about seven, eight years ago and kind of turned it all around and made it what it is today. And it's definitely flourished under them. Miss [Thomas] recently left to go to [CT town], but she took a band with six kids in it and made it into a regional championship and Mr. [Miller] has done similar work on the choral side of things.

JG: Right, right. Okay, awesome. So what do you think are some of the main factors that have driven that flourishing of your program?

GD: I think it takes - I think your number one factor is the person you bring in and their vision. Both of them came in with a vision that was beyond what we could have predicted for ourselves or what we could see for ourselves. So you have to hire you know, as an administrator and as a district, I think you have to hire the right people that have that vision and let them run with that vision, and, you know, try not to kind of constrain them in any way, because we certainly couldn't have predicted what they did here. Everyone said, you know, "it's a small little, it's a small little kind of rural community, and you don't have the talent." And then years later, you know, we have students in Carnegie Hall and all over the nation. So I think it is the vision of the person and I think the school side is to support them and their vision and give them the ingredients they need to get that done.

JG: Okay. What goes into that role of the administration on the school side?

GD: So it's a lot of support. You have to be very open to their ideas. There's a lot of regulation and bureaucracy in education these days and a lot of pushing test scores, but you have to look at you know, student interests. What's best for students? What are their interests, and what are their passions? And obviously you know, music and arts are huge and you know, to me you support that as much as you're supporting mathematics or English or anything else. Because ultimately you're letting the student decide what's important in their lives and what's going to engage them in school and what's going to be meaningful.

JG: Okay, awesome. So thinking about after, you know, four years or however many years in the music program at [Southview], what are the priorities and goals, the things you want the kids to come away with from the music program?

GD: Well, the first thing is I want them to come away with is the quality experience that they appreciate and they're going to remember the rest of their lives you know, whether they continue to engage in music after high school or not, and I certainly hope that they all do and it becomes a passion of theirs if it is their interest, I certainly hope they you know, thoroughly enjoyed their time here in the music program at [Southview] High School and that it was memorable for them.

JG: Good. How would you describe the culture of your music program?

GD: I think the culture is key to building any successful music program, at any school and there's going to be some growing pains when you start out if something has not traditionally been strong in your school and you're fighting against things like athletics or you're fighting against things like scheduling conflicts with AP courses or things like that, and you know, you have a lot of practices for the music that are going to conflict with some of that stuff. There's a lot of buy in work and a lot of work you need to do to help kind of align perspectives that this is the best thing, you know, and that we're all supportive of each other, whether it's students doing more art, students doing more math, students doing more music. That it's not a one size fits all - and that's a lot of your work as a teacher or administrator comes into like helping shape those perspectives so that everybody's on the same team and you know, helping each other out to grow.

JG: Right, okay, good. So thinking about all your years in this school, what strategies or practices or attitudes sort of do you keep in mind on a daily basis when you work with your students?

GD: So I think traditionally in education, you get a top down perspective. So you get policies, things started in Washington and funnel through the State Department of ed and things like that. But I think if you really look into the roots of education, and you're thinking about education as a humanistic endeavor and as a progressive endeavor, it starts with "What's interesting for the kids? What are their passions? What do they see their life becoming? What do they see their schooling becoming?" And I think if you use that as a barometer about what you're doing in school, you're not going to go far wrong. So ultimately, if a student comes in and says, you know, we want to build this program, you know, again, Ms. [Thomas], Mr. [Miller] coming in and having a vision to shape that, and then it grows and you kind of work with it. You kind of try not to block it, or eliminate any obstacles that will help that from growing. But it's, again, you're moving away from test scores, and you're looking at the whole student and the whole child and what's important to them, you're not going to go far wrong. So we - I like to have things happen from the bottom up, and it to be more organic and grassroots driven rather than top down with some kind of owner's type policies that aren't always in the best interest of students.

JG: Right, okay, okay. Um, when you're talking to people from outside of your district, or who don't spend time in your school with your kids, what do you find that you need to make them understand about your kids, what might they not know?

GD: In terms of talking to other educators or parents or...?

JG: Yeah, either/or, whatever comes to mind.

GD: So there is - so I think that schools have different identities and schools have different priorities, and that can happen at the board level, or the town level, or the administrator level or the teacher level, some schools are known for being, you know, they're very strong football towns. Some schools are known for having really strong music programs and booster programs. And some schools are known for being high academic achieving schools. I think there's room for

all of that. But we try to stay away from that elitism where “this is a math school. This is a football school” - It's a school for whatever the kids want it to be. And you have to be open with that. Sometimes you have to let go of your, you know, your aspirations that say, “okay, we're going to go all in on academics, and we're going to lead the state, you know, in these scores” - Because the scores just, you know, happen in isolation, and that's a decent barometer of academic level, but there's so much more to the student experience than those scores.

JG: Right. Absolutely. Absolutely. over those things you said 26 years - How has your teaching or your attitude changed since you started working here?

GD: I think, I mean, I think I got to a certain point in my career when I was more likely to say, “Hey, let's listen a little less to the bureaucracy and the parameters.” And you know, we've been through so many iterations of standardized testing and teacher accountability, and rubrics and standards, and those are great in their place, but there's so much that you miss when you do that - The creativity of the student, you know, the rubrics are inherently limiting. And when you put - Yes, you could have some performance rubrics and for music and whatnot - but you know, you really want the students to feel that they have a voice and ownership in that process, that you can harness that creative side of them that you don't try to like weed it out of them through very defined measures and things like that. You know, and I think any school that has a flourishing arts program and I mean fine arts, graphic arts, performing arts, drama, Music, I think that you get residual effects down the line in terms of academic performance that most people don't see, I think the students are much more well engaged and more likely to do better in their other classes. And for many of our students, and we're about over a 50% poverty rate, they come and they're engaged because of the the arts programs that we have here, you know, and if I had the, the fiscal resources to do that, you know, my vision would be to expand those programs, you know, exponentially as far as I could, for sure.

JG: Okay, okay. How do you see your - How do you see your program changing and expanding? Is there anything in particular that you're looking at or that you're excited about?

GD: Yeah, well, I mean, we - so one thing we've worked on here is kind of these themed academies and we're early in it. So letting a student maybe pick on sort of a quasi-major while they're in high school, whether that be performing arts, whether that be engineering, whether that be health careers. or something like that. And I think the research will show you that if a student can see the through line between what they're doing in school all the way through to what they want to do in their lives, they're more likely to be happy and engaged in schooling. It's you know, I think when you look at something like, algebra always gets a bad rap. But when you're looking at the typical line is, “why am I taking algebra, I'm never gonna need to do this in my life” - you know, well, maybe if you want to be an actuary, you're gonna need algebra. But when you're taking classes that seem relevant and meaningful to you, even as early as the high school level, I think you're more likely to have students that are engaged and happy. So we've started with those themed academies. Obviously, this is a unique situation because of the COVID situation where you know, our town is not the most affluent town but we try to support every program we can. Obviously we're looking to expand. I would love love, love to have you know, a quasi-magnet or an intra-district magnet within the performing arts, build things like set design, you know, vastly expand our music and art program and things like that. And sometimes that can

be a little frustrating because you have to pump the brakes and put that on hold maybe for six months or a year while you encounter these things that are beyond your control, you know?

JG: Right, okay, interesting. Those - those learning academies, what have you found the staff attitude towards them to be, especially from the music side, but in general as well?

GD: But I found that as long as you find people that are passionate about their subject area and your interest, there's buy in, because just like the students, you know, teachers want creative voice and choice within their programming. You know, and it's good to freshen things up. It's good to offer things maybe you haven't done in the past to keep things fresh, like e-music or music production or you know, or media production or things like that. So you're keeping - the students and the teachers learn from each other. Especially with newer technologies as you're going through this process, you know, obviously you want this gold standard, the gold standard, where you have every elective possible and you have the staff to teach - the reality is you have to work within the constraints of what you have for resources and your budget. So you try to maximize that to the best of the student level.

JG: Right. Okay, um, what would you say on the level of the individual students are some obstacles that might prevent students from participating in music?

GD: A big issue is scheduling. When you offer - so we're on an A-B block. So you know, four classes one day and four classes on the second day. Before that, we were on a four by four so it was more of a semester, college-based situation. The main issue you get is you know, when you have limited electives, and you have so many requirements earmarked by the state you inevitably will get conflicts in your schedule where a student has to take English or a student has to - wants to take an AP course for college. They're passionate about music, but they're going into another field and they want to go into the college of their choice, and they have to take an AP course because it's weighted higher. So the biggest structural obstacle for us is definitely the schedule and carving out time when students can pick and not have those conflicts during their day.

JG: Okay, I see. On a more institutional level, what do you think are the biggest challenges in sustaining a strong music program in your district?

GD: Funding you know, funding - there's a limited amount of dollars that have to go to everything that we have to accomplish including mandates and testing and things like that. There is also - you also have to sell, sometimes to the community at large and sometimes to the larger, you know, educational administration that this is a valuable thing and that the research is pretty clear on students and performing arts, especially in terms of math scores and things like that and how it supports everything else. But you have to build that first and kind of trust that it's going to have that trickle down effect on your academics and they're gonna stay more likely to say, let's say, "we'll double up on math at the expense of music, or it's a tough budget year, So let's cut a music position rather than kind of math position." You know, so it's you know, maintaining your staff, not losing staff and then trying to add to your staff and also get the funding for, you know - music and art and things are more costly to fund so you look at doing creative things like fundraising and whatnot to get it done.

JG: Okay, excellent. And the last thing just, you know, broadly - what do you see your role as in continuing to sustain a successful program? We've hinted at this a bunch of different ways, but overall.

GD: To be an advocate, to be a cheerleader, to listen to the kids about their experience and try to fine tune that. I think as an administrator, you're, you know, your client base is your students and they're your customers and their quality of experience and satisfaction is your number one priority. So you listen and you get feedback every year and what's good and bad about something, what they'd like to see in the future, you try to, you know, provide as many opportunities as you can. You try to be as open minded as you can. And again, you're doing this balance, you know, across the board as a comprehensive high school to provide as many opportunities that you can. And sometimes you cannot provide every opportunity a student might like to see, but you can take a swing at it and try and if you try, and you fall down, that's okay. And you get back up and you know, there's not this accountability piece, but we'll just try to reset and build a better experience going forward. And I think student feedback is something that's massively overlooked in education today, student voice, student feedback, student input in their education, you know, and again, I think that drives a lot of what you do and helps you do things better.

JG: Okay, excellent. Any other final thoughts on your music program or your students or anything like that?

GD: No, I mean, our students, if you would have seen what we had, you know, 10 years ago before they came to now, and the power - just on the strength of our music program, we radically transformed the culture of our school - to be a much more accepting place, you know, where our kids support each other. And I think just the power in that and if I had to put that on one thing I would put it on those programs are bringing the school together. When we do the play, you know, we used to have 15 minutes skits for our plays 20 years ago and now we have these full productions where we have art working together, media working together, and tech working together and that really brings the school together. School is kind of a microcosm of the community. And you know, you want everybody to come together and support each other and move things forward. So I think that's a good philosophy going forward here.

JG: Okay, fantastic. Well, thank you so much for this.

GD: Anytime.

JG: Alright, Well, thank you so much for your time. This was really helpful.

Ron Miller, Choir Teacher, Southview High School

JG: So, first thing's first, just tell me a little bit about your music program. What do you teach? How long have you been at your school?

RM: I've been there for 12 years, this will be the 12th year. The music, I mean, the choral program has three choirs. We started 12 years ago there was one group was about 20 kids and now the Concert Choir this year had almost 50, the chorale was about - it was about 40 to 43 but it was a weird setup because it was every other day and we had like two thirds of The kids every day, and a third of the kids popped out every other day. The schedule is different than when you were there. So it was a little weird. And then chamber this year was...20. So and there was overlap, some kids take multiple ensembles. So there's about 110 kids. We have about 640 in the building now.

JG: Yeah. So relative to - relative to the size of your school, the data suggests looking at Connecticut high schools in general, you have a pretty thriving music program. So what do you think are the factors that drive that success?

RM: I think we've got - ultimately we've had a fairly supportive administration. I've worked under three principals. The first was only there for my first year, but he allowed me to overhaul the offerings and offer more choirs instead of guitar and piano classes all day. So that was a first then the second principle that I worked under for 10 years allowed me to continue to try to shift things around, you know, so that we were able to get a workable, you know, program within the confines of the schedule. And then the principal that just took over this year actually was our assistant principal. You may or may not have seen him when you were there. He's like the six foot seven guy, he's just huge. But he's the most pro arts person that we've had. So how things go from here forward is going to be really interesting. I have a good feeling that we're gonna see some pretty big expansions as we move forward. But the support of the admin - definitely when [former band director] Claire was there, she's since left and moved to [Dayville]. This was our first year down there, but having a really successful band program on the other side helped quite a bit. You know, because you've got both programs working in concert with one another. And she was just a good match for me.

You know, when you have someone that high level working in the program with you, it pushes you to be better, and recruit more and get out there and do the best that you can. Um, I think overall, I think the kids just responded to having a place where they felt comfortable. Um, you know that, especially in our district, and districts like ours, a lot of the kids don't necessarily have the same support at home. The kids do everywhere else. And, you know, sometimes - well, more often than not, I should say - They really just want someone to be there for them. And that's what we have. You know, they know that when they come into the program, they're part of something. And for a lot of them, that that's why they come to school half the time.

JG: Right. Yeah, that's interesting. that's come up a couple times. The idea of this being one of the reasons that, that kids come to school. So, do you have any other thoughts in the culture of your music program? that touches on it a little bit, but...

RM: I mean, I think it's just you know, I mean, I think it's because we have tried to foster that family atmosphere. You know, we're you can't have a music program completely devoid of competition. But for us it's not...I don't make it competitive in a negative way. We've got the chamber choir auditions, you know...it's the only group that has the true audition audition. You know, the middle group that chorale you have to basically go through the year of Concert Choir and prove yourself as a musician, prove yourself as a capable, you know, a human and and I grant them access through to the next level of the program. They have to do the audition for chamber, which every year I have about 40 to 45-50 kids that will audition, which to me says that the kids want to achieve at a high level, but that they want to be a part of the group that's kind of the more public face of the program.

But I don't - how do I say it? I make it very clear that it's not the 15 to 20 best singers in the program that get in. It's the 15 to 20 singers that show good musical skill, also that I know will work well together, that are fully committed to the program. And I tell them that I need to make sure that I have musical leadership still in the chorale. So, you know, over the last, probably three or four years that it's been that many kids auditioning, they no going into it that they can't predict the outcome. You know, it's not...It's competitive in a way because they're, they're all actively auditioning for a spot in a group. But you know, in other schools I see it work where, you know, it's very isolated, the kids are prepping on their own. They go in and they're trying to beat the other kids for a spot. For us, the kids are all helping each other through the audition process. They're working together. Current members that have to re-audition are helping new kids learn the material, so that they can all audition side by side, knowing full well that they could be helping prepare a kid that takes their spot. That's not something that I see all that often...So I think that speaks to the side of the program - or not the side, the feeling - in the program that they're all there to help each other and not tear each other down, but lift each other up. So that just contributes into the family atmosphere and having a place.

JG: Awesome. So thinking about students coming out of your program on the other side, what are the priorities, goals, things you would want them to take away?

RM: Um, I mean, I try to - when I'm talking to any of the people that are coming in as clinic, you know, or student teachers or interns or anything, one of the things that I always say up front is that I probably could have taught a few different subjects, but I chose to teach music because I wanted to teach the human. I teach the kid through music. I don't - I didn't opt to do this because I had to teach music. I opted to do it because it was the best course that I could take to see a kid for an extended period of time over the course of the four years so that I could really try to help shape who they become through what we do. So my goal when they come out the other side is that they're - that they're good people. You know, a big part of what I try to teach them is to leave people better than they found them. That's my goal with the kids, that by the time they, you know, leave me they feel like they've gotten something out of it and they're better prepared to do whatever they think they're gonna go do. But I try to encourage all the kids to find their - what makes them happy. You know, I'm not in this to turn out a bunch of professional musicians or music educators - though it happens, and I love it when it does because it means someone's caught the bug to share it with someone else in the same way that I do. But I want them to find a way to keep music as a part of their life, while they do whatever, they're passion is. So trying to help, you know, the kids that are deciding on career choices and going out to be, you know, in the nursing field, or, you know, or whatever they're going to do you know, teachers of other

disciplines or a whole host of different careers, but how do you keep music as part of your life? You know, and that could be as simple as they're going to encourage their kids one day to be a part of a program or they're going to continue at minimum to enjoy and listen and support the arts. If they don't continue to be in a choir or whatever it may be.

JG: Okay, okay. So thinking about the particular students that you work with, are there any strategies or practices or philosophies that you keep in mind and are particularly effective when working with students from your district?

RM: I mean, I think probably the biggest thing is just being honest and myself. I mean, I think I would do that regardless of where I was, but I find that that helps to show them who I am. So that they are comfortable letting their guard down. And just being you know, just being comfortable being in the room, you know, for some of the kids. I've got kids in, you know, especially the larger groups that if they're in another class in the school, you know, they may be kicked out of that class every day and sent to the office or they may have writeups left and right from other teachers, but yet they can come and be productive in my room and not have that same issue. That, to me, that's just because they know that I'm not gonna - I don't sweat the small stuff. You know, we have rules in the school. The kids need to abide by the rules. I get it, but I'm not that person that's going to zero in. It's difficult with 50 kids when they're walking into the room to look at every kid and see, you know, for the miniscule thing, do they have their earpod in their ear? You know those dumb little things that really don't make a difference at the end of the day, right? I'm not that guy. And I'm not going to pick a fight with a kid. And there are teachers that do that. You know, I try to make an effort to really get to know each kid. And, you know, especially with the kids that are at risk, the behavior problem kids emotionally disturbed kids, you know, all you have to do is invest in those kids and show them that you're while you understand what their underlying issue may be, or, or whatever they they may be bringing to the table, that there's a way that they can make themselves successful in your room. And if they know that, and you find a way to, you know, at some kids, I've had to say, okay, we're going to have a hand signal with each other where if you're feeling anxious, and you need to get up and you need to walk around, but you don't want to raise your hand and be like, 'Hey, I'm anxious and I need a break.' You just, you know, give me a wave or whatever it is, you can get up to do what you need to do and come back, but you can't abuse it. Because if you abuse it, then we're in a, you know, a whole 'nother situation. And, you know, for the majority of the kids, they get it right out of the gate. You know, for some, it takes a while to lock in, you know, and they'll push the limit and test the, you know, the waters, but if I freak out on them the first time, you lose them, right? You know, you've got to give a kid a chance to prove themselves and to themselves that they can do it. And if they can, then they know you're happy. They're happy that they made you happy. They're happy that they're not in trouble. Like it's a whole circle. But yeah, I mean, I think I think that's one. I think just being genuinely passionate about what you do. And you know, I mean, yes, music is the avenue that I, you know, teach them, but just being excited to work with them on a daily basis, and let them know that, don't hide it from them. You know, they'll respond to that, you know, no one wants someone that's going to sit in front of them and just plunk keys at a piano and try to teach them their part, they want someone that's going to be invested in them. And, I don't know, honesty - just, I mean, we all have bad days, we all have bad rehearsals. If we're all open with each other, you know, that's gonna be great. I never lie to them. I don't tell them that they're doing good when they're not doing good, and they're fine with

that. Everyone thinks that, you know, blind praise has to be a thing. You know, and we say “great” all the time. But it wasn't great. It was okay. You know, and I'll say things like, “well, that one was better, better than last time.” You know, when they want to get to great, so then they work harder.

JG: Ah, fantastic. So, thinking about somebody coming into your classroom from outside the school or just outside your room, what do you understand about how you work with these kids or about the students that they might not, observing from the outside?

RM: I mean, I joke quite a bit that to anybody else it's gonna look like chaos. But to me, it's organized chaos. You know, I know and the kids know what's expected in my room. But when you have 50 people in the room, especially at the high school level, especially in the beginning choir, there are high school directors, they will try to tell you that their rehearsals are completely silent. Everyone has a pencil. Everyone's on task - I'm sorry. Maybe. It might happen. It doesn't happen for me, and that's okay. That's okay with me. I encourage the kids my best, the best that I can to do everything that I know they need to do to be successful. But not every kid is going to meet that right away. And they might not even meet that for the first year. The light bulb turns on slowly for some of them, but they get it eventually. But if I browbeat them into it and do things that you know, may have worked on me when I was a, you know, a kid or in college, you know, pencil checks, you know, just blatant yelling at you if you don't have your stuff. That might have scared me enough to make me do what I was supposed to do. But I had a much different upbringing than these kids do. You know, they - I found that if you just browbeat these kids and yell at them for not being prepared, it's not going to fix the problem, it's just going to exacerbate the problem. So I continue with the gentle, you know, “this is what we need to be to do to be successful.” Do we have come to Jesus meetings? Of course we do. Do I have the you know, that final, you know, like mental break one day and I'm like, “Oh my god, I can't take this anymore. This group is not functioning where it should be.” And we have that sit down. Of course we do. But it's always - I always try to frame it in “This is what you know, you need to do to be productive. This is what you know, you need to do to be successful. And now I've said it too many times. Now, I think you're not listening because you think I'm, you know, because you've tuned out. So now now we've got to sit down and have this meeting together.”

But for the outsider, yeah, I don't think a lot of people understand what arts teachers do in general or tech teachers do in general, because we're very, I mean, we're performance based, we're very hands on, we're different than everybody else, and that's okay. And that's what I try to get other people to understand. Within my own building, even, you know, don't try to equate what you do with what I do, and I won't try to equate what I do with what you do, because they're different things and that's okay. We all have our different, you know, purposes in the life of the school. But my biggest fear every time I get a student teacher or an intern is the atmosphere, you know, I think everyone comes from a different background. You know, and you guys are all coming out of, you know, collegiate level choirs and, you know, it's trying to make sure that everyone understands that the way that I am with my kids, I don't expect that. I don't expect everyone to work with their kids the way that I do. But my biggest fear is that it makes - the people won't be comfortable with it. You know, and I think it can be mistaken. You know, oh my god, it's, you know, it's crazy. You know, it's crazy in here. It's not crazy. If you know, if you are prepared, and you are - if I'm teaching my kids or they're there, they're paying attention. They're listening. They're doing what they need to do. I get off on side tangents all the time,

which is just part of who I am, and I wouldn't change that. But the biggest struggle that I see with people coming into my program to teach is if they're not prepared to teach, then they lose the kids. You know, and then it really does feel like chaos, you know, because they're they don't have, you know, I should have a different perspective after 19 years of teaching than a, you know, fifth year or fourth year college student. It's just the way that it is. But I've had some kids like [sarah], you know, who, who unfortunately got cut short this year, but she thrived in that environment. She didn't agree with everything that I did. It bothered her that not every kid had a pencil, you know, and there were differences in who we are as teachers. But she is always consistently prepared, and the kids bought into that right away. And so it wasn't that like, "oh, how is it gonna go?" It always went flawless. They were always there for her to work. So, I don't know. I don't know if I even answered your question.

JG: No, you totally did, that's awesome! You did. So, speaking a little bit, you mentioned that, you know, you have a bit of a different perspective after all these years. How do you think your teaching has changed since you started working at your school in particular, over those years?

RM: in my school in particular?

JG: Mhm

RM: Um, I mean, I think, I don't know whether it's school specific because both of the schools that I worked in were fairly similar demographics. One was, I taught in [Brookdale] first. It's a very small version of [Southview], basically, um, but both very rural communities, very blue collar towns. Um, I think the only difference is that [Southview] is bigger and it just happens to be in a different location in the state, and it is a little bit more socioeconomically disadvantaged. We are poorer in [Southview] then [Brookdale] was, but overall the kids are basically the same. You know, they might not be able to - more of them may not be able to afford private instruction, but overall the kids are the same. I think it's just as I've gotten older and as I've matured, my perspective has changed. Where I - just different factors in your life as you move forward over time will impact how you work with kids. Having my own kids impacted how I work with you know, my students. Just being older as myself, you know, coming out of college being a 22 year old male, you know, being dropped into a classroom full of kids, mostly female, your browbeaten in college to be super scared, you know of that dynamic and making sure that you're not friends with kids and making sure that, you know, which is absolutely true. But as you get older I found that my job is more - it's minimum 70% mentor, and, you know, psychologist and father figure then it is, you know, high quality musician every day. I spend more of my time talking to kids and giving them advice and helping them through problems outside of the classroom than I do some days rehearsing. Or at least that's the way that it feels.

I know I wasn't comfortable enough to do that coming out of the gate. You know, letting my guard down being that open person, you know, that real person. And part of that was the age, part of that was just fear. You know, I've seen now, people your age come into the program and be that same thing for these kids, have that same comfort level with the kid and there's no question whether they're friends, they're not friends, but the kids are super comfortable because they trust the people coming into the program. And they can have that same kind of rapport, you know, where they know that they're there for them. You know, they can and I've had, you know, some of my kids go to some of the interns, you know, with, "hey, this happened" or whatever,

you know, and seek that kind of advice, especially a college, you know, “where should I go? What should I be looking for?” like all of the real life stuff that you need to have, that they're not getting from anywhere else. They're now able to get from someone that is in the trenches in college. You know, I'm great with talking about college, but I haven't been there for 20 years. You know, and I haven't gone through the process for 25. So having, you know, people that can have that conversation is great.

JG: Alright, awesome. Um, is there anything you'd change about what you offer at [Southview] or what you teach?

RM: I would love to - I mean, I've actually been talking for years to the gentleman that's now the principal, you know, about expanding the program, getting another teacher in the building. We've gone through a few schedule changes, and I think when you were there, we were on the like, the eight period, modified block with six periods a day. And, you know, so we were like I was teaching the piano class that you guys were helping with, I was teaching music. Now we are back to a modified version of the four by four block, which we initially taught on as a semester. So like semester one was classes one through four, and you met every day, for 86 minutes a period, then semester two would be different classes. Music at that point, we tried to keep as consistent as possible through semester one to semester two, but we'd always have kids that would dump out after the end of the semester one and new kids that would come in semester two, so it was a challenge. Now we've got that same schedule, but it's an A-B. So like, A day is classes one through four, B day is classes - Well 1A through 4A, and B day is 1B through 4B. So like for me, my chamber choir is the only class that I have that's an everyday class. Okay, so it was second period of the day, every day. My Concert Choir was every other day, all year. Okay, my chorale - This is where I was saying before that I had this weird thing with the chorale. I put it in for it to run every day. But this is the first year back on the schedule, they screwed it up. And they couldn't fix all the kids. So I had like two thirds of the kids every day. And then like a third of the group was split between the two days. So some of them got double the time and it was a huge headache trying to remember which groups we did what with and when we missed the section with one group, especially when we had multiple teachers in the mix. But going to this schedule now all I had time for was Concert Choir, my AP I have running every other day back to back with Concert Choir. Then I've got chamber choir and chorale. So I had to drop everything else. So currently that Midi lab or the Mac lab is vacant. There's no classes being offered in it. There is no piano lab right now because that room was taken over by the certified nursing assistants program, and we didn't have the classes to offer anyway. So I've tried to get, you know, the principal to add this other position that would - basically, I'd like to add at least one more choir to the mix that would be a high end all-women's ensemble. You know, like a chamber for women. And then that job I would like to take the Concert Choir and the high end women's ensemble. And then I would take the chorale and the chamber that exists. And then we would split, the other person would take probably the piano classes and I'd take E-music classes.

It was in the initial run of the budget for this coming year and didn't make it through, but it didn't make it through because our superintendent is still there. And he's leaving, hopefully, so going into the next school year, like, not this fall but the next fall, my hope is that it's there. Okay. So yeah, I mean, we're looking to expand the program. Okay.

JG: Okay, so we talked a little bit about scheduling. We talked a little bit about, about, you know, administration. Are there any other obstacles or challenges for students to participate in music and to sustain a strong music program that you can think of?

RM: Yeah, I mean, right now the challenge is the schedule. Going to this, you know, A-B four by four. The school, the district requires each kid to have 27 credits, which is two over the state, max, or the state - Yeah, the state max. Um, and the way that the schedule is being run with the courses like our AP courses - except for me, because I elected to have it as an every other day class - Every other AP in the building meets every day for 86 minutes, which locks up so if you're looking at it, the schedule as, you know, A day four blocks B day four block so there's eight total classes a kid can take, it locks a kid up for two out of their eight classes. So it limits what the kid can take. Now I know that I'm doing the same thing for chamber. But if you look at any college course our classes in high school are supposed to meet the three credit, the three Carnegie unit rule for a college, or three Carnegie a one credit class in school - No, I'm saying that wrong. A three Carnegie unit class in college meets for three hours a week, right? At our school, the college based class, the AP, is now meeting for five days a week times 86 minutes. They're meeting for over two times the amount of instruction they would get in a college class. But if you look at a true college setup, there's only one type of class that meets more than three hours a week. And that's choirs and bands. Right? They meet double the time because you need double the time for adequate rehearsal. But they can't meet every day because of the schedule at the college. We have the ability to technically meet every day, because we can't - we don't have the flexibility in our schedule to go hour class, two hour class, hour and a half class like you guys do at UConn. So that's one of the proposals that I've made to my principal is, I think we need to - we need to modify the way that we approach our schedule, not in the way that we can go from what we, you know, a high school does to what a college does completely, but in the way that right now, basically the class lists of - there's a list of classes in our program of studies. Kids enroll a class, the computer then generates how many sections of that class will run, which dictates what teachers teach and how the schedule works. What I'm trying to convince him and what I think the direction that we're going to hopefully move to, is that these are the courses that are taught. And this is when they're taught. Just like when you go to enroll, you know that your theory class is going to be Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 8am. They would know that that's the way that it's going to work in our school, and that would also allow some of our classes to run potentially, Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Tuesday, Thursday, you know, it would open up the flexibility in our schedule quite a bit. So we could have periods where it was an A B rotation, but others where it was a three day, you know, a three day two day. So who knows, you know, hopefully over the next couple of years, we'll have a much better system to work with.

JG: Okay, good. Um, any final thoughts on your role, on what it means to sustain a successful music program? any of this?

RM: I mean, I think beyond what we've already talked about, I think having an open door to other, to other schools, to other music directors. And, you know, in particular, to, you know, to people like you, you know, student teachers and interns, is a huge asset to my program. Having the ability to reach out to my colleagues in other schools and either combine for concerts if we want to do something bigger, or share music or share ideas -which unfortunately, I see a lot of people close off and not want to do that, whether it's that they're hiding something in their

program, their kids can't read as well as other people or you know, they're getting protective of their own ideas and don't want anyone else to benefit from them for some reason.

That and having, having a continual stream of you all coming in and working with the kids, but working with me, so that we - I mean not only do we get to have good conversations about what we do, which always for me, keeps my eye on what's important. But also I watch and learn just as much from you guys coming in, that you do from working with the kids or watching me work with the kids, because you're all coming in with different rep and different techniques and new warm ups and new, just fresh attitudes that help me stay not stale. Because it's easy to get stale. I've watched programs where you know, they recycle rep every few years. Because it's easy, because that's what they know and they don't want to break outside their comfort zone. I never want to do that because then it gets boring. You know, if you're bored, the kids are going to be bored. You know, some of the best stuff that we've done has been, you know, pieces that interns or student teachers have brought in and gone like, "Hey, I did this. I want to try this out. I think it'll be great with the group." Yes! And the kids fall in love with it. And we all just fall in love with it. And it, you know, it adds to what I have to bring to the table, you know, in another year.

JG: Okay, well, fantastic. Any other thoughts on anything?

RM: On the interview? I don't think so. All right.

JG: Well, awesome. Thank you so much.